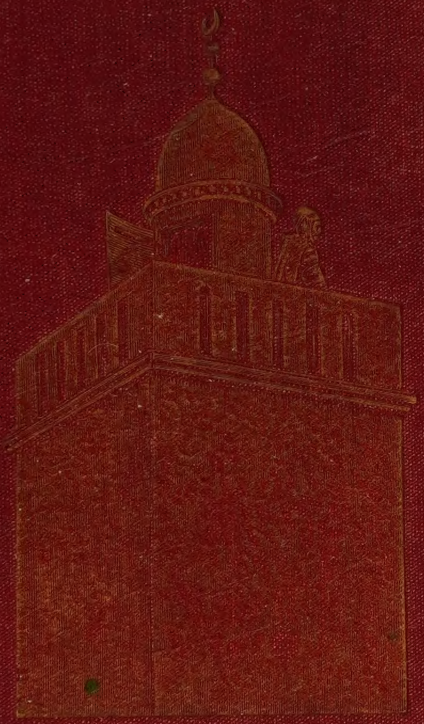

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A mother's love.

Frontispiece.

THE SHIFTING SANDS OF ALGERIA

BY

CHERRY KEARTON

AUTHOR OF

"PHOTOGRAPHING WILD LIFE ACROSS THE WORLD"

"ACROSS AFRICA FROM EAST TO WEST"

ETC., ETC.

WITH 79 PHOTOGRAPHS

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To my friend

T. WALROND INNES

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

ALGIERS 11

The City as I saw it. The Pine, or Processionary Caterpillar.

CHAPTER II

BIRDS, BEASTS AND BABOONS 39

In an Algiers Garden. The Trap-door Spider. Sea Tragedies. The Baboons and Vultures of the Chiffa.

CHAPTER III

THE EDGE OF THE DESERT 85

Bous-Saada and the Ouled Naïls. The Camel. On the Journey.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROMAN CITIES 107

Constantine. The Hot Springs. Timgad and the Storks.

CHAPTER V

THE WAY TO THE DESERT 134

The Bedouin of El Kantara. Biskra.

CHAPTER VI

THE CLIFF DWELLERS 159

CONTENTS

CHAPTER VII

PAGE

OUTSIDE BISKRA 184

Sidi Okba and Jerboas. The Mohammedan Religion. Jerboas. Oases.

CHAPTER VIII

MORE ABOUT BISKRA 209

Biskra again. Hawking with the Kaid.

CHAPTER IX

AROUND TOUGGOURT 237

CHAPTER X

THE SHIFTING SANDS 257

The Desert beyond Touggourt. The Arab. Around the Camp-fire.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

A mother's love . . . . . *Frontispiece*
Old Arab Quarter, Kasbah, Algiers . . . *Facing page* 20
Processionary Caterpillars . . . . . ,, ,, 32
Processionary Caterpillar's nest . . . . ,, ,, 36
The snake that nearly caught me . . . . ,, ,, 44
Two monster toads . . . . . ,, ,, 46
The locust scratching his head . . . . ,, ,, 46
Dervish priest, Algiers . . . . . ,, ,, 56
Rock carvings : near Algiers . . . . ,, ,, 58
The trap-door spider at home . . . . ,, ,, 66
Trap-door spider leaving home and returning . ,, ,, 68
The songster's grave . . . . . ,, ,, 74
Suspicious vultures . . . . . ,, ,, 80
A study in expressions . . . . . ,, ,, 80
The beautiful dancing girl . . . . . ,, ,, 92
The gossips . . . . . ,, ,, 98
Mother and son . . . . . ,, ,, 98
Thirsty camels . . . . . ,, ,, 104
Stork . . . . . ,, ,, 108
Constantine : bridge over gorge . . . . ,, ,, 110
Constantine : under the natural bridge . . ,, ,, 112
A huge cavern under Constantine . . . ,, ,, 114
The stork : I. Contemplative . . . . ,, ,, 116
II. Preening . . . . ,, ,, 116
III. Stretching . . . . ,, ,, 116
The hot springs of Hammam-Meskoutine . . ,, ,, 118
Remains of Timgad . . . . . ,, ,, 124
A theatre that seated over 2,000, Timgad . . ,, ,, 126
Timgad . . . . . ,, ,, 128
Mosaic work and stone doorway . . . . ,, ,, 128
Venus crowning the centaur . . . . . ,, ,, 130
Bedouins on the march . . . . . ,, ,, 136
A famous marabout . . . . . ,, ,, 148
The old sand diviner . . . . . ,, ,, 154
A Biskra sunset . . . . . ,, ,, 154
Rough country . . . . . ,, ,, 164
A Bedouin camp in the Desert . . . . ,, ,, 164

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The entrance to the cliff dwellers' valley	*Facing page*	166
Pools of silence	,,	168
The inhabited cliffs	,,	170
The cliff dwellers' home	,,	172
Roman remains on the mountains	,,	174
Wild boar foraging	,,	182
Porcupine	,,	182
Street scenes at Sidi Okba	,,	184
Carved wooden doorway of mosque at Sidi Okba which fits the stone section at Timgad	,,	186
At Sidi Okba: the oldest mosque in Algeria	,,	192
Jerboa prospecting	,,	196
Jerboa digging in	,,	196
Arab children in old Biskra	,,	214
In the old Arab Quarter, Biskra	,,	216
Mesmerizing a scorpion	,,	218
The three donkeys of Biskra	,,	220
Young gamblers	,,	222
A dervish dancer	,,	228
Arab school in the Desert	,,	230
Dervish fire dance	,,	230
In the Bach Aghar's garden	,,	232
Hawking in the Desert	,,	234
The old falconer and the falcons	,,	236
At prayer near where the date trees are buried in the sand	,,	240
"The Thirteen Seats" at Touggourt	,,	240
The man with a thousand stitches	,,	242
Two methods of travel in the desert	,,	244
Market place, Touggourt	,,	248
Reflections	,,	248
A dancing girl of Touggourt	,,	250
The famous tower of Temacin	,,	252
Bird's-eye view of Temacin	,,	254
Roof of mosque at Tamellaht	,,	256
Horned viper—on the alert	,,	268
Horned viper—on the move	,,	268
Shifting sands	,,	276
Sand lizard	,,	276
Desert fox	,,	282

The Shifting Sands of Algeria

Chapter I

ALGIERS

I

TWENTY years have slipped under my feet, and again I am on the deck of a steamer entering the gateway to Algeria.

Africa, whether it be North, South, East, or West, has a fascination for me all its own. Ordered abroad for health reasons, I became acquainted with Algeria and the Great Sahara over twenty years ago. Since that time I have been fortunate enough to see a good deal of the rest of the world. But I feel glad to have an opportunity to re-visit and extend my knowledge of this wonderful and fascinating part of Africa, which after all is only a stone's throw from our own door.

Twenty years is not long in the life of a city. The French have modernised Algiers, just as a sensible man when he occupies a sixteenth-century house puts in a new cistern or two and installs the electric light. But the house remains the same. The atmosphere of the place is unaltered.

And so it seems to me it is with Algiers as I look at it once again from the steamer's deck after twenty years.

II

The broad sweep of the bay; the blue, dancing water; the bluer sky; the snow-capped mountains in the background; the mass of flat-roofed houses of the Arab town, so white and close together that they look in the distance like the side of a chalkpit; the vivid green of the trees. All these seem to me just the same as ever.

Ahead, too, is that jolly lighthouse, with its wonderful old masonry, built somewhere about the beginning of the sixteenth century and, in spite of Mediterranean gales and the battering of the waves, standing solid as ever. And surely that old hotel on the hillside is the one where they over-charged me when I looked in there twenty years ago!

Hotel-keepers have been hotel-keepers ever since the beginning of things. There is, I believe, in one of the principal European museums, a brick found in Babylon on which a traveller has recorded in cuneiform writing his complaint against the profiteering of hotel-keepers.

Personally, if I can avoid it, I never stay in hotels. Nevertheless, I do not wish to give the reader the impression that the Algiers hotel-keepers are worse than their brethren elsewhere. They are not. The Algiers hotels are clean, the rooms are spacious, the food excellent. And the charges —— Well, of course, we have to remember in extension that before the Algiers hotel-keepers came the Algiers pirates; and I think everyone will agree that, although the effect on the pocket may perhaps be the same in the

long run, an Algiers hotel-keeper is better to stay with than an Algiers pirate.

Great pirates were the Algerians. They were principally Moorish adventurers, driven out of Spain, who settled here with the determination to make things hot for everyone in general and for unbelievers in particular. A nest of wasps, building with the aid of their slaves nests like those of wasps, nests which in this balmy African air seem likely to last for ever —harbour works, a Dey's palace, mansions, public buildings.

The British fleet came to Algiers more than once and tried to smoke the wasps out. The French in the end smoked them out, after the Dey had boxed the French consul's ears and kicked him out of the palace. They took possession of Algiers and have held it ever since. They have improved things out of recognition. They have altered the town in detail. Their buildings crowd the edge of the harbour, high white buildings with many green-shuttered windows. Their avenues of trees ornament the streets. But they haven't altered the life of the people or the old town itself.

The Dey, when Algeria was under the Turks, was a despotic governor only nominally dependent upon the Turkish Sultan. There were three Beys under him, and nominally subject to him. The slavery here in those days was terrible. As many as thirty thousand Christian slaves were employed in Algiers at one time. Their condition was dreadful. Some to escape it

offered to turn Mohammedans. Their offer was in every case accepted, but the renegade found himself out of the frying-pan and in the fire; for the Dey would have him immediately crucified at the gate of the city, and while he was suspended would come and personally congratulate him on dying in the true faith and going to Paradise direct.

The dungeons in which captives were confined were twenty feet deep, with a hole at the top. Into these cells they were let down with ropes, to be hauled up again next morning for the day's labour.

This labour consisted principally of building. If the slaves dared to stop work the overseers flung stones at them and beat them. They were allowed no time off for meals and worked with one hand and held their food with the other. If they were ill a red-hot iron was placed on the part they felt the pain in. Malingering was very infrequent!

Marvellous old Algiers, that compact block of flat-topped Moorish houses standing like a bastion on the face of the promontory! European civilisation beats against it as the waves of the Mediterranean beat against the old lighthouse below. European civilisation washes past it into Africa, surrounds it. But it nothing human will ever destroy. I visit it again in the heat of the day on my first day in Algiers, just as I visited it some twenty years ago.

Intense yellow sunlight floods streets so narrow that there is barely room for a burthened animal to pass. The amount of whitewash consumed in Northern Africa

in a year must be colossal. White, pale blue, pale pink are favourite colours. The inhabitants whitewash everything, covering ruthlessly the finest frescoes and most delicate carving.

The houses of the Old Town themselves are square-built. With their loopholes of windows they remind me of dominoes set on edge. But as I pass along I catch occasionally through a doorway a glimpse of cool paved courtyards, slender columns and of fountains splashing in the sun. Noises here are subdued. The raucous sounds of French Algiers, the hoot of cars, rattling of trams, cries of pedlars, and loud coughing and spitting conversations in the Gallic manner are pleasantly absent.

Here is dignity and leisure, especially leisure. You come across Arabs in white burnouses engaged in low-voiced conversation. Black-bearded fellows with hawk-like features who look at you disdainfully out of eyes that seem to mirror all the wisdom and passion of the ages.

You ask yourself—at least I ask myself—whether there is any truth in these romances of the desert one reads occasionally. I answer, "I doubt it." The romantic-looking gentlemen before me are, probably, ignorant, passionate, treacherous. They are also almost certainly mean and avaricious. They don't have a cold bath every morning. And their scent (I speak of the town Arab or Moor) when you get close enough to them will possibly be found to be ancient and peculiar.

But these Arabs with their white garments are in the picture. I am glad to gaze at them. I am glad to see the quaint-looking, oily-faced Jews, dressed just as they were twenty years ago, the perfume merchants in the tiny, open-fronted shops, the cloth dealers, the Kabyle peasants, the goats, the donkeys. I am glad, astonishing though it is to me, to smell the smells.

What a leisurely life these people lead! They sit basking in the sun all day. You observe them at corners gossiping. You go into a Moorish café and find even during what we should imagine were business hours white-robed Arabs squatting on the floor, ebony-faced negroes playing draughts or—again, gossiping.

A terrible place for gossips, this Arab Quarter of Algiers. The people gossip over their coffee and draughts, as they stand or squat in the intense, clear-cut shadow cast by the buildings, as they bargain at the shops, as they sit in the cafés eating their kous-kous—that national dish composed of crushed wheat, kid's flesh, melted fat and other things.

Some of these frequenters of the cafés, especially of the low-class ones, are men who since childhood have never known what it is to have a home. They eat, work, and of course gossip, when and where they can during the day. They lie down in the open wrapped in their burnouses, sleep—and of course gossip—at night.

What the Arab ladies, Moors by extraction most of them, who live in the domino-like houses think of this eternal gossiping among the sterner sex nobody knows.

Probably it makes them wild, for they must be left without a rag of reputation.

You see very few Arab women, comparatively speaking, in Algiers. They are kept in close confinement, taking the air on the flat roofs. As a great treat sometimes on a Friday their lords and masters permit them to go and have a look at the cemetery.

These Algerians, like the Spaniards, like Latin races generally, have a different conception of life from ours. With us business as far as one can judge comes first. With them religion.

Go to a mosque at pretty well any time of the day and you will find there Algerian business men engaged in prayer, kneeling in the hot solemn gloom where the only sound is the nasal chant of the reader and the plashing of a fountain in the courtyard near by. Islam to the Algerian is a very real thing.

The proper study of mankind is man, but as a naturalist I may be expected to make a remark or two on the other fauna of the Arab Quarter. Camels I shall come to later. Horses one sees occasionally, principally blacks and greys. Sheep there are, goats innumerable, cats, dogs.

But it is the unseen here, as it is in many other places, that is the most terrible.

"Walk in the centre of the street, sir," says your guide, if you have one, when, leaving Europe behind, you abruptly enter the Arab Quarter. You pause at

the warning, gasp, getting well into the lungs a breath of the Arab atmosphere.

"Why must I walk in the middle of the road?" you inquire, halting, pallid of visage.

The answer, though reassuring, is perturbing.

No, it isn't Moorish thieves lurking, stiletto in hand, behind doorways, in wait for your blood that you have to be afraid of.

It is fleas, fleas, fleas.

They lurk in the Arab Quarter, vastly outnumbering the human population. And if you get too close to the wall, well, presently you feel their stilettos!

Yes, the dog is the friend of man. But the friend of the Arab—*pace* his many lady admirers in this country—is the flea.

The Arab Quarter is worth visiting too in the evening, when the blue smoke from the flat-roofed houses curls upward into a bluer sky. Then the small shops are dimly lighted, and you see as you pass as it were in a stage setting the many trades and crafts of this hybrid city in full swing. At one place makers of burnouses are plying their deft fingers. Throughout the East the creators of desert fashions work by night. This trade, even down to those who tread the sewing machines, is mainly carried on by men.

You see the Jew gallant in his gay zouave jacket and baggy trousers bargaining with his compatriot, the perfume-seller, in an endeavour to get a few drops of attar of roses cheap. Both seller and prospective buyer have the long camel noses, cunning brown eyes

and unmistakable oval faces of the Israelite. Their lips are thick, their mouths, especially that of the grey-bearded perfume merchant, are full of discoloured teeth. Go to either of their houses in the crowded quarter of the city which the Jews affect, and you will soon discover why Algerian Jews like attar of roses.

A carpet-seller is next to them. His wares are cunningly displayed, but on inquiry will be found to be very dear. This Arab Quarter is not the place in Algiers where a European can purchase carpets to the best advantage. I know it, for here I have paid double the Touggourt price.

Then there are the shops of the hairdressers, where these same Jews who haggle about attar of roses have probably purchased the grease or brilliantine with which their locks are heavily daubed. You see in these better-lighted domains of the tonsorial artists exquisites, old and young, ugly and otherwise, and of all colours from ebony-black to the palest cream, reclining by the mat-hung wall, waiting their turn to have their beards trimmed or their heads shaved. The barbers work in a leisurely fashion, and not one of the customers appears to be in a hurry. The East!

The cafés now are all full, and are doing a roaring trade, as a glance into any one of them will prove. For this is the time of day when the Arab takes his last meal before lying down and falling into that sleep which, in many cases, is the sweetest thing he is likely to know this side of Paradise.

The pink of sunset is fading from the sky. I sit in an open square smoking and watching the moon rise slowly over the town. A bat or so flits across its silver disc, but presently even these small creatures have disappeared. The noises of the city about me die away. And I am left alone with Algiers.

What a change the weird, fairy illumination of that silver disc has wrought. Surely, Man in the Moon, you must be an enchanter! All the squalor of the day has fled. And before me lies a city glimmering white, very still, "a dwelling fit for the best." The flat-topped houses have acquired an unbelievable nobility in that silvery splendour. Pencils of snow illumine their beauties. In this magic what had seemed before a bit of dirty white-washed wall has become a gem of Eastern architecture. Cornices, huge balconies that one has never before remarked show clear. Arches stand out, chaste and beautiful. The massive buttresses of the mosque look as if built to weather all eternity. Its minarets stand poised, delicate, as if designed by a master architect, and, to make the picture complete, behind to the right the silvered palms wave in the night breeze, delicate against the violet sky.

To see an Eastern city in all its beauty it is not necessary to go to Bombay, Constantinople, Bagdad, or Cairo. Within three days of Piccadilly stands this Arab quarter of Algiers, a place that contains within its boundaries all the charm and squalor, poverty, luxury, magnificence, and beauty and simplicity of the Mohammedan world.

Old Arab Quarter, Kasbah, Algiers.

(Taken 20 years ago and the same to-day.)

Facing page 20.

At the top of the Arab Quarter near a Fort where a part of the ancient wall stands I watched for some time an old Arab snake charmer engaged in his professional duties. From there I went on to an odd-looking market where every conceivable kind of rubbish was for sale, and thence farther along near the wall till I came to three open-air barbers shaving with water only and two dentists who were waiting for customers.

The dentists had a pile of teeth lying on the ground. This was to show that they were men of experience, popular with customers. The instruments they had by them were not safe to use on a cat.

When I tried to get a picture of these dentists they glared at me angrily and ran off like hares.

It is a very interesting walk from the wall of the old town down through the narrow and dark Arab streets, none of which are alike for twenty-five yards, to the Place du Gouvernement. The people and architecture vie with each other half the time as to which can appear the most out of date. It is in the most unexpected place you discover the interesting things. Go, for instance, a yard or two through a doorway and up a few steps and you are looking into a tiny cemetery where a king is buried. Some of my studies reproduced are of the oldest streets ; and it might interest the reader to know that I sat at one place in the Old Town for six hours at a time to get these studies. In the Arab Quarter, if you do not happen to have a guide with you, the people crowd round you ; and some of them are apt to get very angry with you, as they do

not like being photographed. Still, on my last visit I found a dark-eyed beauty, and a couple of francs changed her anger to smiles. She allowed me to take her photograph. I verily believe she would have walked in front of the camera another fifty times if as many francs had been forthcoming.

The Arabs call Algiers the diamond set in emeralds. And without doubt the white beauty of the place and the vivid green vegetation of its suburbs give it a title to the name.

During my first visit I stayed in a house on the edge of the city. I shall never forget my first impression of the wonderful scene which met my eyes as I looked out of the window in the morning. In front of me a beautiful sunlit sky, a lovely blue sea, and, far away in the distance, the Atlas Mountains tipped with snow. Days I spent during this visit in the Arab Quarter. Days again in the pine woods overlooking Algiers. Time seemed all too short.

I remember a couple of monkeys outside the house where the late Queen of Madagascar lived during her exile that used to interest me. I remember a beautiful garden where I used to sit with my old friend Mustaph Rais and watch the birds.

Now on this second visit I had been looking forward to a renewal of my friendship with Mustaph, and immediately on my arrival wended my way to his place of business, only to find a notice on the door with an ominous black border announcing the fact that he was to be buried that day.

Alas! I had lost a valued friend who could have refreshed a faulty memory! It was he who used to take me to the Arab Quarter at night, thus helping me to glean much knowledge of Arab life. It was from him I heard a great deal of the Arabs' early history and of their many struggles for freedom.

As is well known, the French after their consul had been grossly insulted by the then Dey of Algiers as mentioned above, in 1830 sent a large expedition and took possession of the town. An heroic Arab chief, Abdl-el-Kadr preached a holy war and successfully held the French in check for many long years. He was subdued in 1842, and finally surrendered in 1857. Since then until the last few years insurrections have been very frequent in Algeria.

Privately I was told that Mustaph Rais owned much property at one time, but after a futile attempt at a rising he was made a poor man. He had a nephew to whom on my first visit I was introduced, a bright little fellow whom he wanted me to take to England and have trained as a merchant. But as this was not in my line I had to decline.

On my first visit I was Mustaph's guest in his home, and got some idea of what the women's life was like among the Arabs. Mustaph's household seemed happy. Arab women generally seem quite happy, and I am certain would not change places with, for instance, the women in the East End of London.

I notice during this present visit a marked difference in the status of the women of Algiers.

They seem to have much more freedom and are better dressed.

The country, too, seems much more prosperous. I think the French have done well for it, in spite of their many interests elsewhere. They know that they are in possession of a remarkably rich country, as did the Romans before them.

A wonderful people the Romans. The ruins of their buildings are everywhere. A visit to Algeria to see the marvellous work they did will repay any archæologist. The old aqueduct behind Algiers is a monument to the skill of their workmen.

Another improvement I notice in Algiers is in the condition of the streets. Crippled and blind beggars used to be very much in evidence. The guests at hotels were pestered with these individuals. Some cripples walked on all fours like animals. I feel sure disability was manufactured. As for the blind, it is no exaggeration to say that often in a short saunter I would meet dozens coming along hand in hand in groups spread across the roadway, in charge of one man, who could see.

This is all changed now. Only once during this visit have I seen a group of blind beggars, and that was whilst I was standing studying a remnant of the wonderful wall which surrounded old Algiers. There in a corner five blind men were sunning themselves quietly. I started taking a cine record of them. No sound came from anywhere. Suddenly one of

the group said something and jumped up. The rest jumped up after him. The group scattered.

Blindness among the Algerians generally is not so much in evidence as it was once. The disease causing it is contagious ophthalmia, spread by flies. Arabs have a foolish idea that a fly must not be killed. In consequence flies in Arab countries have a heavenly time. They congregate on all the meat until it looks black. Disease is carried by them. They spread it very quickly.

Of course, sun and sand have something to do with the eye trouble common throughout the Desert. I have experienced a little eye-inflammation myself after being caught in a sand-storm. And this reminds me that I would advise any intending traveller to take motor goggles with him—a good idea would be to have them tinted yellow and thus serve two purposes.

One thing has impressed me on both of my visits, and that is the smooth and excellent governing of the country by the French. It is impossible to come away from Algeria without an increased respect for the French as colonisers. They took over the country when it was in a derelict condition, and for years lost money there. They found the mountaineers at war with the Arabs of the plains, poverty everywhere, and bribery and corruption rampant.

They have made excellent roads, modified local systems of government, conciliated the various races in that then inhospitable country, and been stern with them where necessary.

They have spent millions in their endeavour to give to the people peace, safety for their commerce, houses, and a better civilisation. And now they have in reward a rich colony, full of flourishing industries and a population of several millions of French subjects, most of whom are loyal to the flag.

On the military side they had a stiff time of it before they subdued those people so hostile to them. But the French are a nation of soldiers just as they are a nation of engineers. They made roads for the soldiers into the heart of the hostile districts, took position after position, slowly, and consolidated the defence of what they took.

For twenty long years or more Frenchmen shed their blood on the battlefields of Algeria. They have to shed it no longer.

But still the French are not satisfied. Even now they are pushing their way slowly south. You will find in every important oasis on the north side of the Sahara devoted French officers and their little bands of subordinates. How these men, living in that furnace heat miles away from every sort of civilisation, must long for a sight once again of the Avenue de l'Opera and the Bois de Boulogne!

A prosperous country is to be seen now where before they came was barren sand. Progress has been rapid. If a man had said a few years ago that he would cross the Sahara in a few days his listeners would have thought him a madman. To-day Desert transport is so good that such a feat is easily possible. Twenty years

ago, with a few Arabs and as many camels, I wandered in those vast silent sands where the murmur of stream and the rustle of trees are always absent. To-day those sands behold trains, zeppelins, hear aeroplanes and motor caterpillar cars humming like bees. The spell of the Desert is broken. The Romans, as has been said already, made great strides in the North of Africa, and have left some wonderful monuments behind. But there is no evidence that they ever conquered the Sahara. The French have conquered it. The wonderful series of wells they have sunk at great cost is alone worth seeing.

I cannot help comparing North, South, and Central Africa. In the Desert as in the plains of South Africa water for the use of man is brought from the depths of the earth by means of windmills. In Central Africa, a much more fertile land than either of them, nothing in this direction is done.

North Africa is as progressive as South Africa. When British Central Africa has the same energy and money put into it as the French have put into Algeria a different story of its progress will be told.

During my first visit to Algeria I had a rather narrow escape one day. Wandering along the hills overlooking Algiers with my little companion, a twin lens camera, I suddenly found myself amongst some big guns which had been placed there to protect the town. I had taken a picture only a moment before! Realising my danger, I quickly left the spot without being seen.

The next day I heard a visitor had been arrested while sitting on a seat near the sea-shore. His offence was what I would describe as absent-mindedness. He had been found making curious drawings or tracings in the sand with the end of his stick and was promptly arrested as a spy. Happily things seem different in Algiers now. So far as I know the visitor may roam now where he will.

A further illustration of the progressive spirit evident in Algeria. I had a day or two ago a visit from Doctor Guillermopuelma, of Chili, conveying a very urgent invitation from Doctor Warrenoff (the famous gland specialist) to be present at an operation he was performing some fifty miles away that afternoon, and also to see the results of his experiments. These experiments were made on cattle and sheep, and had been carried on for some time; and I must say the results convinced me as an old farmer that the work being done was sound and likely to benefit the settler. At a lecture given the previous day in Algiers Dr. Warrenoff made the statement that you could not do as you liked with a chimpanzee in England, but you could with a man. Rather amusing this, and astonishingly true.

II

Whilst on my first visit to Northern Africa I found myself wandering in some pine woods at the back of Algiers.

There was quite a number of birds about, several of which were migrants, and many lizards looking for a sunny spot, and a fly or two. I stood watching the birds, speculating whether this one or that would nest in England, or if not, where. And then I happened to notice something behind a branch, and on going up to get a closer view, to my delight saw a beautiful nest some twenty to twenty-five feet above the ground. I was not long in climbing the tree. Holding on with one hand, I reached out and felt round the nest for the entrance. Then with an exclamation promptly withdrew my hand. I had made the discovery that this nest did not belong to a bird at all, but was the home of a number of caterpillars. And they were not harmless caterpillars either. They possessed the power of stinging, and they had stung me badly. The pain lasted for some hours.

Later, in 1909, when I was with Mr. Blayney Percival, late Game Warden in East Africa, I again saw similar caterpillars. Mr. Percival found them first. Although I warned him, he put his hand in the nest. The result in his case was much worse. He was stung in several places, and within a few minutes was in great agony, and he remained so for some hours.

Later on, in East Africa, I came across another kind of caterpillar which gave me a different but equally disagreeable sensation. Its sting produced an intense itching and nearly sent me mad.

Again during the War I was in camp near Kilimanjaro. On turning out my sleeping-bag one morning

(I was sleeping on the ground, as my bed had been "hot-stuffed," *i.e.* stolen) I was amazed to see a scorpion, centipede and a hairy caterpillar fall on to the ground. None of them had touched me. But in the next tent a fellow-officer was dancing all over the place like a cat on hot bricks. He rushed into my tent eventually to ask me what had attacked him. He was aware I knew the country. I searched his tent, and pretty soon found his sleeping companion in the shape of a hairy caterpillar.

To return to my hairy discoveries in the pine woods by Algiers. On examining the nest which so to speak had bitten me I found it was the home of a colony of processionary caterpillars. Deeply interested, I returned to those pine woods again and again, and watched and studied these caterpillars for days together. They would march in procession by day and feed by night. Their activity was amazing. I used to call them Pilgrim Caterpillars, as they were always out on some pilgrimage or other, coming back to the nest at night. And I still use the name Pilgrim Caterpillar when I tell stories to my friends about these wonderful little fellows and their ways.

After narrowly observing these creatures come in processions of from three to ten yards long down the tree, I at last discovered that in doing so they left a silken cord or ribbon behind. Usually they returned over it, but on occasions I noticed they missed or ignored this railway. Twice I found a couple of processions about to cross the road not far apart,

looking very quaint and solemn, marching head to tail. I very carefully shepherded these two processions into each other. A little confusion ensued. Then one lot waited for the other, and both lots at last formed up, making one long line, and marched off together, all going back to one nest.

This action on their part led me to think that the lot who inhabited one nest could not distinguish any difference from those in another. I noticed, too, that the leader of the procession seemed to give itself airs. It would stop, causing the whole procession to stop behind it, rear itself up as if to get a better view of the situation, and then march on.

So now I made an experiment. I carefully lifted the leader out of the way and placed it at the end of the procession. At once the whole procession halted, then marched on under the new leader. But before beginning the march the new leader gave itself airs in its turn, jerking this way and that and rearing itself up like the last leader, afterwards starting off as if quite used to the job. Further experiments convinced me that all the members of the procession could lead if called upon; in fact, that every caterpillar, like Napoleon's soldier, had a field-marshal's baton in its knapsack.

And now what of this wonderful rail of silk they laid down? I made another experiment, the most interesting of all. To this day I cannot explain the result I obtained. I have recorded it on the cine-camera now, so perhaps some member of the public may explain it for me. The experiment consists of

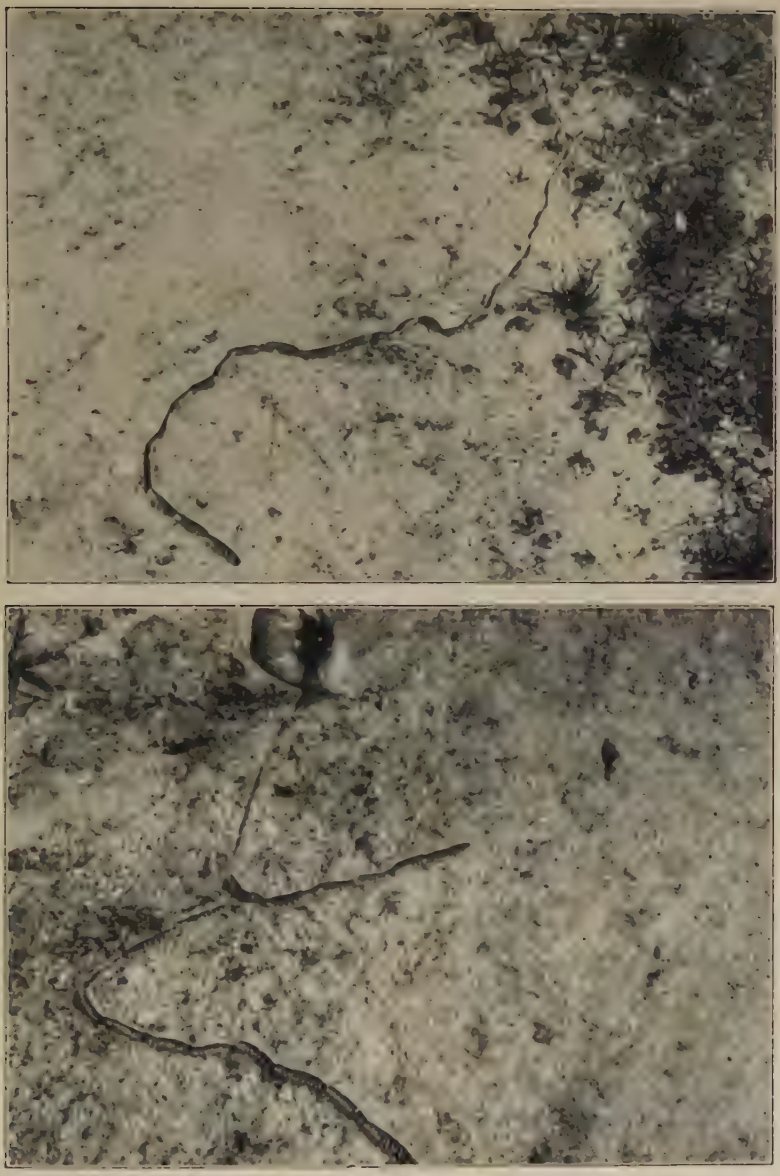
carefully and quickly rolling a caterpillar away a few inches from the middle of the procession. If this is done the leader suddenly stops, and with him the whole line from end to end.

The member who has been interfered with starts to make his way back to fill the gap which has been left open, the caravan meanwhile waiting dead still. As soon as the dislodged caterpillar gets into place again, and makes contact head to tail, the whole line starts off as promptly as if some word of command has been given!

Whilst marching at night in single file during the War in Africa my mind often went over my experiments with these caterpillars, and I thought what a pity it was we soldiers could not communicate with each other as easily as can the Pine Caterpillar.

There is no doubt these Processional Caterpillars go out for regular walks and follow the silken ribbon on their return to their home, or, at any rate, strike it on the way back. Since my notes were written I find Fabre experimented with this silken rail. He made the caterpillars go round the top of a big vase, then he carefully cut the ribbon so that it made a complete circular rail. Will it be believed, they kept on that rail for seven days, actually walking twelve hours a day, making altogether eighty-four hours, before one of them fell off exhausted, leaving his silken cord behind, which the rest followed.

Last March I was watching a procession of these caterpillars going along. Suddenly the leader stopped



Processionary Caterpillars. Facing page 32.

at a sandy place and started to burrow. The rest came on, formed themselves into what was almost a rolling ball. They turned round and round at the same spot, bringing more sand and earth up each time until they all had disappeared.

I said to myself as I walked away, " That is good-bye to you." I knew that in a few days they would be changed to chrysalis, and that their next appearance above ground would be as moths.

But sometimes Nature performs strange conjuring tricks! Passing that way four hours afterwards I noticed a procession of caterpillars marching away from the spot I had watched earlier in the day. Naturally I thought it was another family going home. But to my astonishment I found they were my friends of a few hours before.

I had said good-bye to them when I thought they had retired for good. Half were out and on the march. The others were taking their place in regular order, like a file of men leaving a lead mine.

Waiting until the last one was out, I examined the place, and found they had only been able to dig down some four inches. This evidently was not to their liking or deep enough for them, and when I met them they were returning to their old home again to rest for the night and prospect again on the morrow.

The following day I watched and saw them again, going in another direction. The same thing happened. They burrowed into the ground and disappeared. This time I think they were satisfied, because I waited

until nearly dark but they never appeared again. Next day I had a look under the ground. I found my friends at a depth of some eight inches. "Now how on earth," I asked myself, "is the moth going to emerge through all that soil after the ground has been sodden and hardened during the months the chrysalis is resting?" A friend who saw me taking the moving pictures in Algiers has kindly sent me J. H. Fabre's book, *The Life of the Caterpillar*, and I am sure the reader will pardon me if I quote from that most wonderful and painstaking naturalist, who has devoted the whole of this book to the Processional Caterpillar and supplies the answer:—

"The moth appears at the end of July or August. The burial took place in March. Rain must have fallen during this lapse of time, rain which beats down the soil, cements it and leaves it to harden once evaporation sets in. Never could a moth, unless attired and equipped with tools for the purpose, break her way through such an obstacle. She would perforce require a boring-tool and a costume of extreme simplicity. Guided by these considerations, I institute a few experiments which will give me the key to the riddle. In April I make a copious collection of cocoons. Of these I place ten or twelve at the bottom of test tubes of different diameters and, last of all, I fill the apparatus with sandy soil, sifted and very slightly moistened. The contents are pressed down, but in moderation, for fear of injuring the cocoons below. When the month of August comes the column of earth, damp at the outset, has set so firmly, thanks to evaporation, that when I reverse the test-tube nothing trickles out. On the other hand, some cocoons have been kept naked under a metallic cover. These will teach me what the buried cocoons would not be able to show.

They furnish me, in fact, with records of the greatest interest. On issuing from the cocoon the Pine Bombyx has her finery bundled up, and presents the appearance of a cylinder with rounded ends. The wings, the principal obstacle to underground labour, are pressed against the breast like narrow scarves, the antennæ, another serious embarrassment, have not unfolded their plumes, and are turned back along the moth's sides. The hair, which later forms a dense fleece, is laid flat, pointing backwards. The legs alone are free, fairly active and endowed with a certain vigour. Thanks to this arrangement, which does away with all awkward projections, the ascent through the soil is made possible.

True, every moth, at the moment of quitting her shell, is this sort of swathed mummy ; but the Pine Bombyx has in addition an exceptional aptitude rendered necessary by the fact that she hatches under the ground. While the others, once out of the cocoon, hasten to spread their wings and are powerless to defer their development, she, by virtue of an indispensable privilege, remains in her compact and wrapped-up condition as long as circumstances demand it. Under my bell-glasses I have seen some who, though born upon the surface, for twenty-four hours drag themselves over the sand or cling to the pine branches, before untying their sashes and unfurling them as wings.

This delay is evidently essential. To ascend from beneath the earth and reach the open air, the moth has to bore a long tunnel, which requires time. She will take good care not to spread her finery before emerging, for it would hamper her and would itself be rumpled and badly creased. Therefore the cylindrical mummy persists until the deliverance is effected, and, if liberty happen to be acquired before the appointed moment, the final evolution does not take place until after a lapse of time, in conformity with usage.

We are acquainted with the equipment for emergence, the tight-fitting jerkin is indispensable in a narrow gallery.

Now, where is the boring-tool? The legs, though free, would be insufficient; they would scrape the earth laterally, enlarging the diameter of the shaft, but could not prolong the exit vertically, above the insect's head. This tool must be in front.

Pass the tip of your finger over the Moth's head. You will feel a few very rough wrinkles. The magnifying glass shows us more. We find between the eyes and higher up four or five transversal scales, so set as to overlap one another; they are hard and black and are trimmed crescent-wise at the ends. The longest and strongest is the uppermost, which is in the middle of the forehead. There you have the centre-bit of your boring-tool.

To make our tunnels in granite rocks we tip our drills with diamond points. For a similar task the Bombyx, a living drill, wears implanted on her forehead a row of crescents, hard and durable as steel, a regular twist-bit.

By good fortune, of the numerous moths ascending from the bottom of my apparatus through a column of sand solidified by the evaporation of the original moisture, some are making their way upwards against the side of the tube, enabling me to follow their manœuvres. I see them raising their cylindrical bodies, butting with their heads, jerking now in one direction, now in another. The nature of their task is obvious. The centre-bits, with an alternating movement, are boring into the agglutinated sand. The powdery wreckage trickles down from overhead and is at once thrust backwards by the legs. A little space forms at the top of the vault, and the moth moves so much nearer to the surface. By the following day the whole column, ten inches in height, will be perforated with a straight, perpendicular shaft.

Shall we now form an idea of the total work performed? Let us turn the test-tube upside-down. The contents, as I have said, will not fall out, for they have set into a block; but from the tunnels bored by the moth trickles all the sand

Processionary Caterpillar's nest.

Facing page 36.

crumbled by the crescents of the drill. The result is a cylindrical gallery, of the width of a lead pencil, very cleanly cut and reaching to the bottom of the solid mass.

The nest of the Processional Caterpillar is laboriously and beautifully made, as all of them are. The accompanying illustration gives a fairly good idea of the average nest. On many occasions I watched the little fellows apparently sunning themselves outside of one of these nests before going for a pilgrimage.

I find now on wandering over my old hunting ground that the ravages of my friends among the pines have been so great that foresters are killing all and sundry at sight. I came upon a man just exterminating a procession and rescued a number—put them into my hand camera case—then found a nest, cut it down and took it to a friend's house and gave them a new home, which they soon occupied. Yesterday I saw them try to dig in, but after the first inch and a half they came to stone, and it was not long before they gave up their task and marched back again to shelter. To-day I have to leave, so my interesting studies come to an end, much to my regret.

The following incident which took place during my first visit dwells in my memory. Sitting in the pine woods one day watching a procession of the Pine Caterpillar, I was joined by a gentleman who had met me several times before, and the conversation somehow got on to the subject of tele-photography. I was explaining to him some of its wonders and thinking of that brilliant man, Dallmeyer. I expressed the

opinion that in future wars photography would play an important part. He there and then told me as a great secret that he represented a certain country, and offered me a post as a demonstrator in photography in that country's army. I declined the invitation. Necessary though armies may be, to make my career in one did not appeal to me.

Chapter II

BIRDS, BEASTS AND BABOONS

I

THE country immediately about Algiers is very beautiful. The many hills behind it have an elevation of from six hundred to one thousand feet. On these stand amid vivid greenery the villas of the well-to-do inhabitants, most of them French and Jews, for the Arabs of the more wealthy order have largely forsaken Algiers of late years, finding they can better live the sporting and agricultural life they like in more thinly-populated districts.

The vegetation hereabouts is South European in type, with of course an extra hint of tropical luxuriance. One sees cedars and olive trees, laburnums and flowering acacias, ilex, oak, and lilac, which flowers in profusion in its season. And the plain near Algiers is covered with vineyards.

I suppose what will impress the traveller on a first visit to this delectable country is the profusion of flowers. Never was there such a country for flowers. Roses, lilies, clematis, azaleas, hibiscus, narcissi, bougainvillea and a multitude of other well-known varieties bloom in every garden and often by the wayside. Some of the wisteria on the villas is very

beautiful. The soil about here is fertile, and any derelict paths and ruined buildings become quickly overgrown with vegetation.

A great nuisance to the explorer, especially if he gets among the poorer-class settlements, is the prevalence of dogs. Everyone seems to keep two or three of these animals. And they not only bark at the passer-by, they will bite without any provocation whatever.

From one of the hills near by a good idea can be obtained of the operations which the French undertook for the capture of Algiers.

They landed on a sheltered beach within a few miles of the city, and met with hardly any opposition, the Turks having collected their forces at another point. A single gun only opened fire, and one of its shells killed a French sailor, otherwise no casualties were incurred.

All the next day was occupied in disembarking the army, which consisted of some forty thousand men.

Meanwhile the Turkish forces had been hurried to the spot and had entrenched themselves about a mile from the shore.

But a French division soon drove them back. The rest of the soldiers were put to work to convert the landing-place into an entrenched camp.

When the work was completed the French advanced. They had had no previous experience of fighting the Turks, and expected to have trouble with the Arab cavalry. The soldiers had been, therefore, provided with palisades made of chains and lances to keep these

horsemen off. But these weapons of defence were not brought into use, for the Arab horsemen proved to be a danger not to be feared by disciplined European troops. The French broke up the Turkish forces without the slightest difficulty and, killing four thousand men, continued to push forward their armies, entrenching themselves carefully and taking no risks.

The ground between them and Algiers was such that the poorest European troops might have stopped them. But, try as they would, the Turks were unable to stop the French. They were even unable during the last battle to take advantage of the serious mistake made by a young, untried general, the Duc d'Escar, who got lost with his troops in a difficult ravine. In a fright they abandoned their guns and fled for Algiers, taking shelter under its walls.

The French, following them at a leisurely pace, proceeded to invest the key of Algiers, the Fort of the Emperor, which stood on a high hill right above the city. Here, after they had taken it, the invaders placed guns and the siege of the city began. The Turks, who had blown up the walls of the Fort of the Emperor, now returned to the kasbah, whither the French followed them, and established themselves on a small hill within three hundred yards of it.

The Dey of Algiers, now thoroughly alarmed, sent out his secretary with a white flag and offered to pay the entire expenses of the French expedition and satisfy their demands if they would retire.

The French general replied that nothing less than the unconditional surrender of Algiers would satisfy him.

The secretary retired to come back again with another proposal. This was that the Algerians should assassinate their Dey at once and put a man in his place who would be agreeable to the French.

This extraordinary proposal was also declined.

And again the secretary went back empty-handed.

But the population was now in desperate fear. This enemy was one which clearly could not be resisted. If he took the town by storm he would of course plunder it and murder them all. They went to the Dey and insisted on his immediate surrender, an order which, as he ardently desired to surrender himself in all probability, he at once proceeded to obey.

The whole of these successful operations of the French were completed in under three weeks. But it took a very much longer period than that before they established themselves securely in Algeria.

Algiers has much to interest the student of natural history in and around it. I happened to be staying where there was a quiet garden on my first visit, and on this my second visit I studied nature in the beautiful old garden of Col. and Mrs. Burnett.

When I glimpsed my solitary hoopoe first in that garden, I told myself that he was an odd bird migrating north. However, I soon discovered he had a wife, and more, that the pair of them were cleaning out their old home.

This home, in the hole of a tree, was some twelve feet above ground, but the bank where I was hidden was on a level and within a few yards of it. I could therefore study these beautiful creatures quite easily.

Such an opportunity to study them as I had now was not to be missed. I was much struck at the time they spent in this one tree which was going to be the home of their family. On inquiry I was told that they nested there every year. The female bird would go into the hole and disappear. Then after a long time she would come up, on which the male bird would disappear whilst the female waited for him, after which they would sit around looking as if they were thinking matters over.

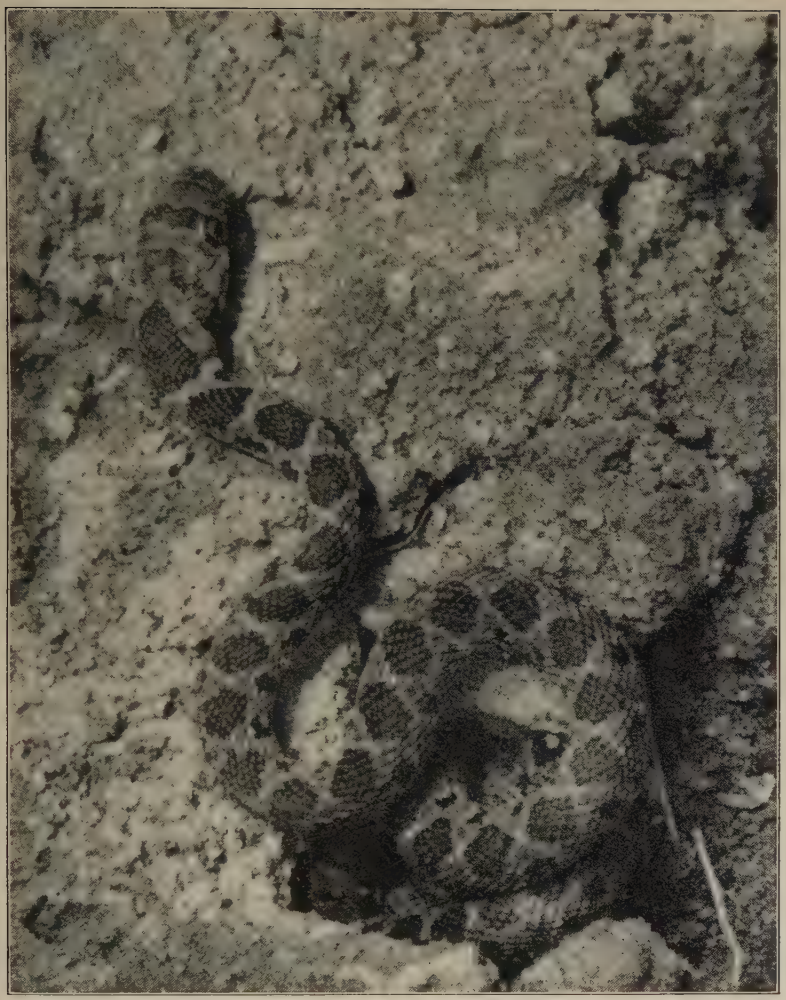
I knew they could not see me, and felt sure they were quite happy to find everything in order in their old home. My only regret was that I should never see the family they intended to rear.

I have seen it stated that the hoopoe bobs up and down a great deal, raising and lowering its crest. But these birds, whilst hanging round the tree and spending much time in it, did very little of this bobbing up and down. The male, who was within a few yards of me, raised and lowered his crest several times, and my heart was breaking because I could not get a kinematograph picture of it.

When the hoopoe has its young a particularly offensive odour comes from the hole in the tree where it has nested. This odour some naturalists thought at one time to be due to the food the birds fed their

young on. But later it was discovered to be the result of some substance secreted and thrown off by the tail glands of the parents. This secretion may be used for protection, like the hissing some other birds make when protecting their young in holes in trees. I am thinking particularly of the wryneck, a specimen of which was in this garden at the same time as my hoopoes, but disappeared after a few days, I take it on his migration north.

Northern Africa is the chief home of the hoopoe, but he visits countries farther north in numbers during the summer months. The crest, which is a charming part of this bird, is composed of a double row of long feathers which can be raised and lowered at will. I have noticed on other occasions that this crest only comes up at certain intervals, and especially is it flat when the bird is flying and alighting. Just after he is perched the crest rises up. Hoopoes spend quite a lot of time on the ground searching for insects. It is said they fight furiously amongst themselves and are very cowardly. Some observers state that they are shy of mankind. On the other hand, I have heard that they are quite tame in some places on the Sahara. An Arab story with regard to this bird goes something as follows: King Solomon (he is called by the Arabs King Sulieman) was very much overcome with the heat, and asked all the birds and beasts to protect him from the sun's fierce rays. The hoopoes solved the difficulty by flying in great numbers over him, and the protection of shade and the air from their



The snake that nearly caught me.

Facing page 44.

wings pleased him so much that he rewarded them by bestowing on them a crown or crest, which they wear to this day.

Whilst I was watching these hoopoes one afternoon, out of the bank from some small grass and sticks slid a beautiful whiplike snake. I mean beautiful from the naturalist's point of view. He had his head up and his movements were simply wonderful to watch. He stopped and looked at me and then glided along the path. I wanted to see more of this gentleman, and later got a chance to photograph him ; but in trying to get him to pose for the camera he nearly bit me. I had made a little study of him, when suddenly he made off at lightning speed along the path. He wanted to be off ! But I was too quick. With the long handle of my cine-tripod I tried to stop him. Like a flash he turned and struck, missing my hand and hitting the handle.

Then a curious thing happened. He gave a wriggle, turned partly on his back and pretended to be dead. I waited for one hour for him to come out of his deathlike attitude, and then, having to go away, I left someone else to watch him. After another hour, I was told, he looked up and glided quietly off. I knew when I left him that he was merely giving me an illustration of how he could feign death, a method of escape from danger which is practised by other animals as well as snakes.

While walking in the garden one morning I saw within a couple of yards of me a beautifully-coloured

lizard basking in the sunshine. Then, a yard farther along, I came across a young giant toad. He was peeping out of a little hole in the rock which just fitted him. A little farther away I discovered this young toad's parents, two monsters about seven inches long and five inches across. I picked them up. They seemed very nervous. Every day afterwards I saw them in the garden. It was, I conclude, their home, and possibly had been the home of toads for generations.

There, too, one day I saw a great grey locust fluttering from tree to tree. I made a few studies of him as he sat on a branch. After waiting for an hour to get a few feet of animation on the film, I began to get tired and told the locust what I thought quite bluntly, in fact almost rudely. I finished my remarks by observing: "Don't sit there like a silly dummy. For heaven's sake do something, if you only scratch your head." To my astonishment the locust promptly did so, and I made a record which will be exhibited later on the screen.

This picture took me quite an hour to obtain. It flashes across the screen in a few seconds. I wonder if the public will ever realise the amount of time it takes to secure the film record of a natural history subject? Personally, I can't hope that the more thoughtless of them ever will. The film-taker—that is, if he be a true nature lover—loves the work for the work's sake, and, further, he knows that always among those who afterwards flock to see the film will be many thoughtful lovers of nature too, who will

Two monster toads.

The locust scratching his head. Facing page 46.

appreciate the patience required to get the results they behold on the screen.

Pondering such matters as I sat in my garden, I became aware of a movement in some dead grass near by. Although the spot where I noticed the movement was only a couple of feet away, I could not for the life of me see anything. At last I came to the conclusion that it must have been a bit of dead grass moving in the breeze. I did not give up the search, however, and eventually my patience was rewarded. The picture puzzle loomed into sight.

In front of me, harmonising beautifully with the grass, was a stick insect some three inches long. That little fellow had been watching me all the time, and it was a case of who moved first.

These stick insects are among the most wonderful of the creations of nature. They occur in most of the warmer regions of the world. In Borneo, for instance, when the weary exile is sitting dozing on his lonely veranda at night, he will often be awakened by a smart blow on his face. It is merely a stick insect that has come fluttering in, dazed by the light of the veranda lamp.

During the war in East Africa I caught a wonderful stick insect of a species strange to me, about ten inches long and as thick as my little finger, with wings some two and a half inches long. Much to my sorrow I lost him during a scrap with the enemy.

The praying mantis is another interesting insect of a similarly curious build. I have often seen this

little fellow in Algeria. He is rather clever in the way he remains motionless, harmonizing with his surroundings, and thus deceives his victim, which is, more often than not, a fly. But at night he is more easily caught, as he is attracted by light. The mantis female is just as much of a cannibal and murderer as the trap-door spider, making it her rule to kill her husband soon after they are married. These insects have been spoken of—I think the word comes from the Greek—as "Diviners," due to the fact that they hold their front legs like arms raised to heaven ; which attitude has led people, and especially the superstitious, to believe they can foretell the future, and to make them an object of worship. Especially was this so in years gone by in Central Africa. Moufset, a naturalist of the seventeenth century, says on this subject in a description of the mantis : "This little creature is considered of so divine a nature that to a child who asks it its way it points it out by stretching out one of its legs, and rarely or never makes a mistake."

I used to get quite a lot of amusement out of a couple of mantis that I brought from the heart of Africa and kept alive in London. It was very interesting to see one of these mantis wait motionless when he saw a fly come along. He would move forward quite imperceptibly. Then in the twinkling of an eye he would seize his victim between one of his front legs—the front leg of a mantis has a series of hooks on it—and, holding it with one arm, exactly as a child holds its doll, would quickly devour it.

Another thing these two mantis of mine used to lo was to sit up and have a boxing match.

Many years ago I used to show a film of the praying nantis catching a fly. When he had caught it and vas busily eating it a chameleon came along carefully, peeped down and crept forward, and with a lightning troke of that wonderful glue-ended tongue of his, o the astonishment of the mantis, took the fly out of his arm and left him supperless.

There is another form of mantis which lives in the Desert, but so harmonises with the sand that it is very difficult to see. What it lives on is not known. I saw an explanation some time ago (which did not give me very much comfort) that it lived on microscopic insects. Perhaps these little fellows are like ny trap-door spider, and so constructed as to be able o live a long time without food.

A visit to the Tropical Gardens at Algiers is well vorth making. The wonderful avenues of trees, and he beautiful tropical vegetation bear comparison with ny in the world. And to think this can be seen in vinter time after three days' travel from London!

Algiers remains, as I have said, much what it was wenty years ago. One sees about the port itself the ame heterogeneous collection of vehicles, motor-cars, uses, carts. The same big grey donkeys, mules, goats, nd scraggy horses. The same screaming and vociferating native population — Arabs clad in dirty, baggy garments, turbaned, ebony-visaged negroes, boys with hining rows of ivory teeth, weirdly-dressed peasants

clutching their bits of merchandise, officials in fezes, and a sprinkling of Europeans.

Tourists are being driven off to the hotels with piles of baggage. Touts of these hotels are everywhere. The air is full of dust, the scent of musk, tobacco, and unwashed humanity.

And the native business quarter, as I have said, is not changed either.

I saw there some old brass workers' and jewellers' shops. The same eager throng of tourists was busy at the curio dealers. The crowd in the streets was international as usual. Natives of all tints, from the light-coloured Berber to the ink-black, sinister negro from Lower Egypt or the other side of the Sahara; poor Arabs in dirty brown; rich, stately Arabs in finely-woven burnouses of grey or white and blue-coloured cloaks.

Native women of nondescript race were to be seen occasionally hurrying along, their faces veiled, heelless slippers on their bare feet.

And to give additional colour to the scene throbbing with life and interest now and again would come along a Spahi in red or blue uniform. The Spahi in red is always, I understand, a French soldier, the one in blue in the service of a Kaid.

Of course, there are side streets here, as in most cities, into which the tourist will find it better not to go, narrow streets where at the windows and the doorways of the huddled, dirty houses sit scores of women. These women are unveiled, their faces are rouged, their

skins powdered, their eyelids touched with kohl, and their scantily-clad bodies are covered with cheap jewellery.

Yes, to sum up, I have found Algiers, especially as regards the old part, much what it was twenty years ago. The only change that has impressed me really this time—I regret to have to say it—is the weather. Can it be that in addition to adopting European civilisation Africa is about to adopt European weather ?

Chapters could be written setting down the explanations I got later from people I met as to why the weather has been so bad. One or two explanations are worth recording.

Some friends and I discussed a snowstorm I had just been through in the Desert. One of them admitted that a snowstorm in the Desert was a phenomenon unknown in Algeria before, and went on to explain that snowstorms in such a locality were solely due to the Great War. The war had unsettled everything in Algeria, he said, and it would be years before even the weather settled down again.

"Rot!" said another of the party, or something to that effect. "It 's simply the result of wireless. Wireless ought to be suppressed. In time it will affect other people's health as it has done mine. There is no wireless about here, and already my health is much better."

He evidently did not know that as he talked he was sitting within a stone's-throw of a big Government wireless station.

Another said the North Pole was getting top-heavy

with ice, and we should in all probability have the Ice Age all over again.

I weighed in then with an account, absolutely true, of a terrible hailstorm I was in in the Congo Forest in 1913.

Hailstorms on the equator! Nobody spoke any more. Their thoughts concerning African weather were evidently inexpressible. My contribution had been apparently as effective in ending the discussion as my story of the old professional stone-waller had been on another occasion. It runs as follows:—

In my part of North Yorkshire we have no hedges, but stone walls. These were built by professional stone-wallers. Some half dozen of these men were sitting one day in a bar-parlour describing the amount or length of wall they could build or had built in a day. Their statements regarding their prowess seemed more than a little exaggerated. A very old man, who had not spoken, was appealed to as to what he had done in his day. He said: "I once built a wall so long in one day that it took me two days to go back and fetch my jacket."

Whilst on my first visit to Algiers I was talking one day to a number of French people in the place where I was staying. I told them of the beauties of our little island. But no one wanted to visit it. One lady, the wife of a French professor, was most emphatic in expressing her disinclination. She said her father, many years before, visited London and was deeply offended by some insult.

"Well," said I, "why not try Scotland?"

"What!" she cried. "Venture into a place populated entirely by brigands who wear skirts! Impossible!"

They don't quite understand us even yet, the French. Before the war they understood us not at all. They judged the bulk by the sample. And the sample was often of poor quality.

The behaviour of a few of the British who visit Algeria is perfectly abominable. I suppose we shall never get away from the globe-trotter who thinks his money better than any one else's, and fondly imagines the country belongs to him. They told me in another part of Africa of a war-millionaire visitor they had. Every morning this man would loudly call: "Abdullah! Abdullah!" Then say to himself: "No answer, and me with all my money!"

On my first visit I had made the acquaintance of the American Consul and his wife, who were of great assistance to me. They seemed to know where and how to find the most interesting things of the town.

One day they suggested, as something new for me, that I ought to visit a cave where the immortal Cervantes, the author of *Don Quixote*, who had been captured by Algerian pirates on the High Seas, hid himself after one of his attempts at escape whilst a prisoner in the city.

I found the cave on a hillside overlooking the Tropical Gardens. The entrance to the cave was roughly blocked with wire. A peep inside showed

me standing on a pedestal a white bust of Cervantes with an inscription in Spanish underneath.

The story told me was that an Arab girl fell in love with him whilst a prisoner and helped him to escape. She fed and cared for him as he lay hidden in the country beyond the prison, until a couple of soldier spies, becoming suspicious, watched her, with the result that she was followed and Cervantes retaken.

I had made up my mind to visit the place again this time. Finding I could not remember the exact location, I made inquiry after inquiry of people who ought to have known it, from guides and so on. I was told—gently—that there was no such place. My war experience had not, I knew, made my capacity for remembering things any better, and these people nearly convinced me that I really had only dreamt of this wonderful cave. However, one day in the Arab Quarter I struck up an acquaintance with a little Frenchman, who, finding I was English, told me he had married an English woman and that therefore we were brothers. In further conversation he also gave me the information that he was a guide. Gingerly I brought the conversation round to places of interest in Algeria. He at once told me that he was the only really reliable guide in Algiers.

"Where is Cervantes' cave?" I said.

He looked surprised.

"You are the first man who has ever asked me that," he said. "I will show you."

"When?" I asked.

"Now," said he.

"Where is it?"

"Over there." He pointed to the Bay of Algiers.

"I thought it was!" I exclaimed. "Come along then!"

And off we went in a cab.

Tin-pot houses were being built on the hillside near the cave. We drove into a new road where the cab promptly stuck in the mud. We abandoned the cab and started off on foot up the hillside, to find, when we got to the spot we were aiming for, that the builders were hard at work some thirty feet above the cave digging part of the hillside out to put houses on.

Luckily the cave with its contents was there, just as I had seen it twenty years before. I found it very neglected. My guide reported my disgust to the Spanish Consul.

Later I was handed a photograph from a model of the memorial which it is intended to erect in front of the cave, and was told that steps had been taken to preserve the place. They told me also that I was the only visitor for years who had made inquiry about Cervantes' cave. Had I not happened to move in the matter I think that jerry-builder would soon have destroyed the last vestiges of Cervantes' hiding-place.

Many stories have been told and printed of Cervantes' Algerian experiences. The main facts are that Cervantes was captured on the High Seas and was held a prisoner here for many years, and that

after three attempts to escape he was finally ransomed by his sisters, who sold all their estates in order to get him his liberty.

The Algerians themselves care little for Cervantes. The majority almost certainly have never heard of him or any other man of letters. They are ignorant people steeped in superstition.

I remember witnessing during my first visit a rather quaint illustration of their credulity, a ceremony interesting and barbaric.

At the end of Algiers in a quiet corner by the seashore I came upon two women and a boy accompanied by a large negro, who held a butcher's knife in his hand. The boy, who was sick, had been brought there by his mother, apparently an Arab. The negro was evidently a sort of high priest. The other woman carried an incense pot and acted as priestess. First I saw the mother pay a fee. Not until then did the ceremony begin. Incense was kindled in the pot and wafted round the boy by the priestess. Then the negro took a fowl and smoked it well with incense also. Next he crossed his arms left over right and then right over left. Then laid the fowl on the shingle, pinned down its legs and wings with his feet, stood erect and pointed east, west and north with his knife. Finally he made a sign of the cross on the ground and quickly severed the head from the body of the fowl and stepped aside. The fowl jumped about. The negro dotted the boy's face with blood, two dots on the forehead, one on each cheek and one on the chin. While this

Dervish priest, Algiers.
(*Note fowl at his feet.*)

Facing page 56.

anointing was going on the fowl continued to hop. As the shore was sloping it soon reached the sea, which was only a few yards away.

The priest and priestess showed their satisfaction with the fact that it had reached the sea, and so did the mother. Their pleasure, I discovered, was due to the fact that it was a good omen for the fowl to reach the sea and meant the recovery of the boy. I wonder how many fowls hop the other way. A moment's thought will convince anyone that a headless fowl would naturally hop downhill nine times out of ten.

I ran over to this place by the sea-shore again during this my second visit, as I had been told that the ceremony was still carried on. The locality has altered considerably. A big sea wall has been built and a fine road made through the place. The photograph on the accompanying page was taken over twenty years ago.

I was sorry not to see my negro priest again. He was a particularly fine specimen of a particularly fine race. The negroes are perhaps the most satisfactory people in Algiers. They are happy, industrious, and comparatively hardworking. The Arabs treat them as equals, marrying their women and giving their daughters to negroes in marriage.

An Arab woman, it is said, likes a negro husband. She calls him " my little snowball."

To the Frenchman, of course, black and white are both alike. He is not so colour-proud as we are. And an Algerian negro is a fully-fledged French citizen.

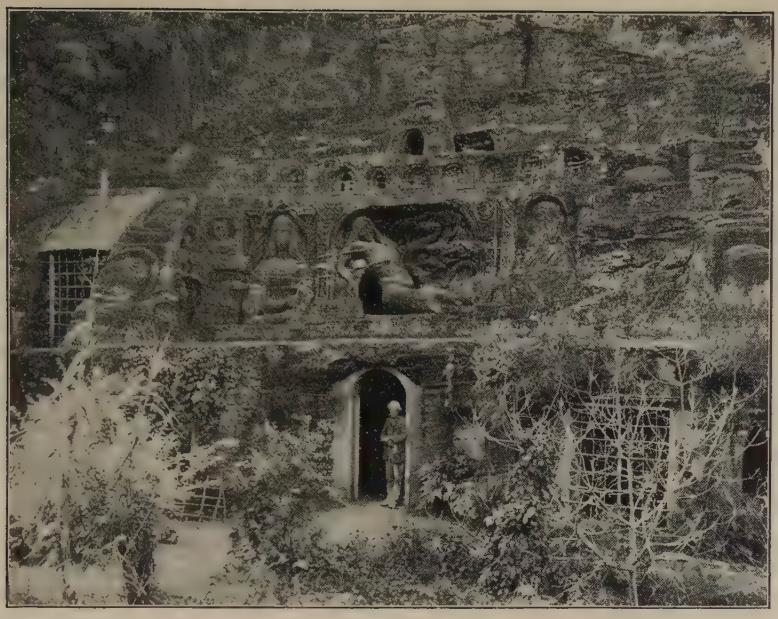
The French are logical above everything. They are ruthless where they wish to improve. In their zeal for efficiency they sacrifice even monuments sometimes.

At the back of Algiers near the pine woods I came across some interesting carving on the face of a rock in the hillside, beneath which were tunnels. I have tried this time, as I tried twenty years ago, to get information as to the origin of the carving, but without success. An illustration of it I reproduce here. Let us preserve a record of it before it is sacrificed, as the cave of Cervantes might have been. Personally, I think this piece of carving is comparatively modern. Nevertheless, the workmanship is very beautiful.

As has been stated somewhere above, the lower part of Algiers has been almost entirely rebuilt since the French occupation. But in some few instances the old native buildings have been kept, although generally the French destroyed them as not conforming to their notions as to what a house in a French street should be. And even those which have been allowed to remain are very much altered. One great mosque here has in front of it a colonnade taken from another mosque which the French destroyed when they rebuilt this part of the town, and looks very much the worse for the alteration. And so with many of the other old buildings which have been preserved.

The result of building all these new streets by the French was the discovery of the ancient town, Icosium, on the site of which modern Algiers stands.

This town has been explored by means of excavation,



Rock carvings: near Algiers.

Facing page 58.

and its plan seems to have been much that of modern Algiers, the streets of the ancient city and the new one running in many instances one above the other.

But Algiers occupies a greater area of ground than did the ancient Icosium. This is proved by the discovery of two ancient cemeteries within the boundaries of modern Algiers. It is well known that the Romans, the builders of and dwellers in Icosium, never buried their dead within the walls of their towns.

One of the Roman roads leading from Algiers passed right along the coast as far as Carthage, in what is now Tunis, thus running through the Kabyle country, perhaps the most fertile part of Algeria. Another ran south in the direction of the Atlas Mountains.

Icosium could never have been a Roman port of any size. Its harbour would have been small, as no causeway then connected it with the original Algiers, the island on which Algiers lighthouse now stands.

El Bekri, an Arab historian who wrote about the middle of the twelfth century, has stated that he had seen at Algiers extensive remains which suggested that in a previous era the place must have been of great importance. He particularly mentions gateways and an amphitheatre, in the mosiac pavement of which were patterns of figures representing dogs, lions, camels, donkeys, cats, and other animals. The Mohammedans, at that time were using this amphitheatre as a place of prayer.

But El Bekri is as an historian not much to be relied on.

In any case, the Romans when they came to a country always built public buildings lavishly. It provided occupation for their prisoners and impressed the inhabitants.

The country about Algiers at the time of the Roman occupation was inhabited by Berbers, a people, by the way, who have always required a good deal of "impressing" before they would bow the knee to the conqueror.

These Berbers in this immediate neighbourhood of Algiers were permitted to cultivate their land on payment of tithes to the Romans. And when the Romans retired from Africa they would have resumed possession until the Arabs came and once more caused them trouble.

Excavations have brought to light from time to time various Roman remains of interest to the general public—fragments of pillars, columns, statuary—but very little trace is left now above ground of the town of Icosium.

I mentioned the Dey of Algiers above, but I scarcely mentioned the Kasbah. This beautiful fortified palace is well worth a visit, and its chief features are described in most of the guide books. It happened, unfortunately, that this was the only place in Algiers which the French soldiers plundered when the town was taken. The plundering began by a few people (possibly Americans ?) going into the building during the

confusion and annexing a few souvenirs of small value. But those who, encouraged by their example, followed were not content with a few souvenirs. They took everything of any value away with them. There was trouble about this afterwards, and one of the French generals was charged with peculation. A great many people in Algiers, however, still believe that the French Government itself was really at the bottom of the plundering of the Kasbah, and that most of the treasures there found their way into its possession.

Be that as it may, there seems no doubt that the French when they took possession of Algiers behaved generally in an exemplary manner towards its inhabitants. They strictly prohibited Christians from entering mosques, sternly punished offences against the Arabs and their women, and treated as ordinary thieves soldiers who disobeyed the regulations regarding the respect to be shown for other peoples' property.

II

While wandering along under some trees near Algiers I came across a sloping bank of reddish earth, in some places covered with a little moss and in others a little foliage. I examined the bank carefully, with a view to finding something that might meet with the approval of the eye of my camera. In one sheltered place I thought I saw a slight difference in the texture of the moss, and on making a closer examination, to

my great joy and delight I found I was looking at the lid or door of a trap-door spider's residence.

With a needle I carefully lifted the lid up, but to my disappointment the place did not seem to be inhabited, or, at any rate, no one seemed to be at home. But even this empty nest was a discovery. As may be guessed, I looked that bank well over for the next fifty yards. I was just about to give up my search in disgust when I luckily again spotted another door. Luckier still for me, this time the occupant was at home. I tried various means to get a sight of her. But she would not allow me to open the door, coax her as I would. Of course, I could have forced the door, but I did not want to do this. So I left the little dweller alone for the time being.

I returned to the nest several times later, and began to seriously study its inmate and her ways. It was a task of some difficulty. Trap-door spiders only leave their nests in the dark. I knew the creature's habit. "Perhaps," I said to myself, "she may appear occasionally in the daytime." So I sat in the shade of the trees during the daytime, waited, watching till my eyes ached, for that door to open. I thought that the spider would at least look out. They do look out sometimes when waiting for their prey.

I continued to watch. I must have got jumpy with excitement at last, for at least a dozen times I could have sworn that the door was lifted up and down and the spider was peeping out. At length, to satisfy myself I quietly took a photograph of the door just at the

time that I thought I saw the lid up, in order to prove it was up. When I had developed the plate I found my eyes had been deceiving me. The door came out shut.

After spending several days without gaining any further knowledge of my spider or any further information whatever except what the photograph of the exterior of the nest gave me, I came to the conclusion it was hopeless and useless for me to waste any more time watching in the daytime. My little friend was certainly nocturnal.

Now, was I to abandon hope of being introduced to my discovery? I decided "No." If she was too modest to show herself in Algeria—where all the ladies are modest, more or less—well, perhaps she would be kinder to me in London! I got a spade, and very carefully cut a square foot of the earth that surrounded the nest, digging to well over a foot deep. Then I gently lifted the cube of earth so isolated into a box and very carefully packed it up. When I left Algeria soon afterwards I carried it myself aboard the steamer. Since I removed it from its bank four months ago nobody has handled that cube of earth but me.

During the journey home I examined my prize frequently but not a sign of the spider did I see. When I arrived at St. John's Wood I was anxious to find out if my little captive was still alive. She was, I found, and so then I became anxious about food for her.

The weather was still cold in England. I could get nothing in the garden that I thought a spider would

like to feed on, but I invented and made up several kinds of tit-bits which I considered might possibly tempt my little friend. But she wouldn't look at any of them.

A month went by without anything I put in the box being touched. I was desirous of finding out what was happening at night, so I had an electric lamp placed just over the box. And there was not one hour in the night in which I didn't have a look at it. But on every occasion I found the trap-door shut. It must have been shut instantly the light was switched on. After a week or so I got tired of playing this sort of game. So I determined to try and make the spider show herself by another method. I left her in darkness for a while, and then, going round to the back of the trap-door, gently opened the window shutters of the room, letting in the light. The plan succeeded. I noticed to my delight one morning that the trap was about an eighth of an inch open. The feet of the spider were visible along the edge of the tunnel. But when I peeped round from the side to have a look at my fair captive's face she spotted me, and the lid was instantly closed down.

Three mornings after the same thing happened again. A few days after that I was lucky enough to find a beetle in the garden. This I caught and put into the box very carefully without disturbing the spider.

I then watched the beetle walking about. When he finally crossed the top of the trap-door at the back of

the tunnel, the lid was carefully opened and the spider peeped out, proving that the movement above was telegraphed below. Unfortunately, at that moment I made a slight movement. The spider saw me. Whether she had been looking for the beetle or wanted to discover what strange footsteps she had heard going over the roof I don't know. But the door was instantly closed down again. She didn't open it again, although I waited for an hour.

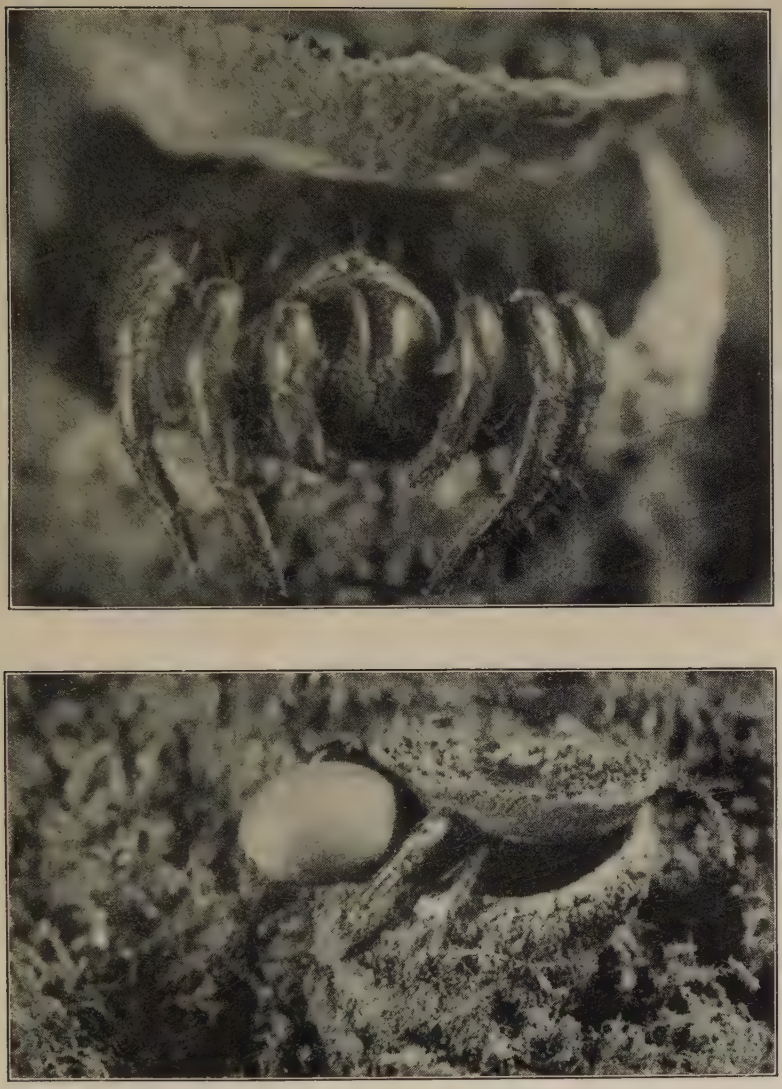
That night the beetle disappeared! I did not see any further movement until a couple of days afterwards, when the door moved and was carefully lifted up. Then out came a twisted leg, then another, and then the shell body of the beetle. I retrieved the beetle and examined it. It had been literally cut up. But very little of it had been devoured.

Another week went by. Every night during this time I tried to catch my spider outside her nest, but without success. Every morning I would lift the trap-door up. My little friend was as strong as ever and held that door down with plenty of vigour. Knowing that trap-door spiders like a place which is fairly damp, and that the earth in the box was getting dry I sprinkled it with water. Next morning I had a lesson in how beautifully the trap-door spider is accustomed to keep its surroundings. Everything around the edges of the door had, during the night, been trimmed and polished up to perfection. But still my lady's appetite was fickle. She had eaten scarcely anything since I had had her. Two or three days afterwards I had

the luck to find a bumble bee in the garden. Apparently it had just died during the cold snap we had been having.

"Here's a bit of luck," thought I. I took the defunct bee into the house, opened the trap-door and placed him in the tunnel, well pleased with myself at having got my shy guest some food to be going on with. I went away to have my morning cup of tea. On my return I saw to my astonishment that the dead bee was lying outside again. As he was a dead bee he could not have walked out of the tunnel himself. I thought I'd try him again. So I once more opened the trap-door, put him down the hole, then closed the trap-door and waited.

After about five minutes the door began to move, lifting a little and then a little more. The sight of it moving reminded me very much of the way a mole-hill moves while the mole is working underneath. Now, I thought, I shall see my trap-door spider appear dragging out the bee. But no! Instead of the spider which I expected to see, the bee began to make his appearance little by little as something within pushed him farther and farther out of the hole. . . . The lid was well open now. And then I saw the spider lifting him. She seemed as if she was in the act of taking a better hold so that she could finally throw him out on to the surface. When, with another mighty heave she did this, literally throwing him bodily out, she quietly closed the door. After a few seconds' interval she re-adjusted it and all was still again. . . .



The trap-door spider at home.

Facing page 66.

My little friend is getting tamer, and now keeps hold of the lid or door until I have it half open and I can see her easily. But she still persists in abstaining from all food. It is a long time now since I abducted her from the bank, and yet there is no apparent difference in the way she treats the food I offer her.

I have tried house flies, small beetles, bluebottles, etc., putting them down the tunnel and closing the lid. Always with the same result. A few minutes after they are put in the door is opened and they are uncannily ejected. One of the funniest games I had with her was with a caterpillar and a bluebottle. After I had put them in the tunnel it was not long before the lid began to move. I found she had brought both of them up the tunnel together. The bluebottle was first pushed on one side until he practically propped the trap-door open, when from the other side she pushed the caterpillar clean out of the tunnel. And then she tackled the bluebottle. She had lifted both of them as far as the door at the same time. After the caterpillar was pushed out he lay on the ground for a moment, evidently stunned by his experience. Then jumped up, and without waiting a moment, went off as hard as he could.

Recently I have been able to get one or two photographs of my trap-door spider peeping out of her door. These I think are worth reproducing. I had been looking forward to the time when she might have young ones. I can see now that I shall be in for a disappointment.

Before sending this book to the printer I add a last bulletin concerning the doings of my interesting guest :—

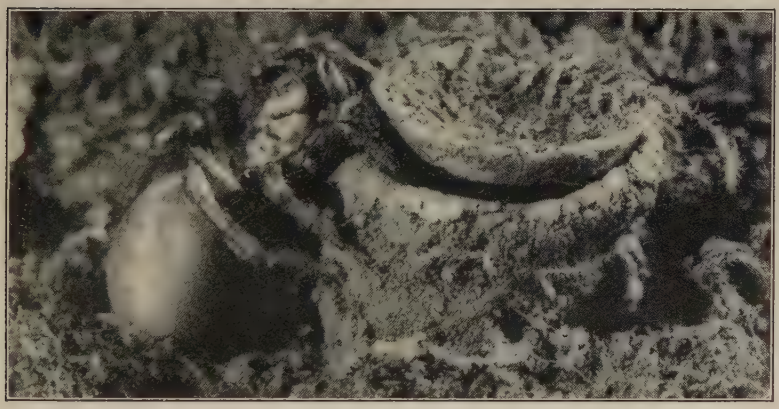
At last my spider and I are getting friendly, and whilst I sit at my table beside her she lifts the lid of the tunnel carefully and, as it were, leaning her elbows on the ledge, watches me writing. Then closes it carefully, lifting it once more after a few minutes' interval in order to have another peep.

I now feel that I shall get a good look at her very soon, and wonder what she is like. I have been to the Zoo to try and see a trap-door spider, but they have not one there. South Kensington Museum has a South African trap-door spider. But nowhere have I seen one like my little friend. . . .

I wrote the above last night. This morning I gave her a very fine bluebottle, and this has not been thrown out. Now, this evening, as I write under the electric light, the trap-door moves, she peeps out . . . watches me awhile. Well, how disappointing! She has carefully thrown the head, wing, and a leg of the bluebottle out, closing the door . . .

Now she is peeping out again, watching me. . . . I can see her many eyes gleaming. We are certainly getting more friendly!

I will try what she will do with this camel-hair brush. . . . I have tried. She attacked it at once, taking a firm hold. I pulled her up gently and nearly to the surface, and saw her clearly for the first time. I repeated the process and got her out of her tunnel



Trap-door spider leaving home and returning.

Facing page 68.

completely. I am much surprised at her size and difference from those trap-door spiders I saw in the Museum. She is a larger spider than I thought. . . .

I have now been lucky enough to get a series of photographs of her, some of which, if I can manage it, I shall reproduce in this book. After she has posed for a photograph she goes quietly back into her tunnel and shuts the door again on me. Her manners are excellent.

Fabre on the subject of the trap-door spider that he studies makes excellent reading. I print a quotation from his book, *The Life of the Spider*:—

From her inch-high turret, the Lycosa lies in wait for the passing Locust. She gives a bound, pursues the prey and suddenly deprives it of motion with a bite in the neck. The game is consumed on the spot, or else in the lair; the insect's tough hide arouses no disgust. The sturdy huntress is not a drinker of blood like the Epeira. She needs solid food, food that crackles between the jaws. She is like a Dog devouring his bone. Would you care to bring her to the light of day from the depths of her well? Insert a thin straw into the burrow and move it about. Uneasy as to what is happening above, the recluse hastens to climb up and stops, in a threatening attitude, at some distance from the orifice. You see her eight eyes gleaming like diamonds in the dark, you see her powerful poison fangs yawning ready to bite. He who is not accustomed to the sight of this horror, rising from under the ground, cannot suppress a shiver. . . .

Chance, a poor stand-by, sometimes contrives very well. At the beginning of the month of August, the children call me to the far side of the enclosure, rejoicing in a find which they have made under the rosemary bushes. It is a magnificent Lycosa with an enormous belly. . . .

The obese Spider is gravely devouring something in the midst of a circle of onlookers. And what? The remains of a Lycosa a little smaller than herself, the remains of her male. It is the end of the tragedy that concludes the nuptials.

The sweetheart is eating her love. . . .

Early one morning ten days later I find her preparing for her confinement. A silk network is first spun on the ground, covering an extent about equal to the palm of one's hand. It is coarse and shapeless but firmly fixed. This is the floor on which the Spider means to operate. . . .

The time for laying has come. With one quick emission, the viscous pale yellow eggs are laid in the basin, where they heap together in the shape of a globe which projects largely outside the cavity. The spinnerets are once more set going. With short movements, as the tip of the abdomen rises and falls to weave the round mat, they cover up the exposed hemisphere. The result is a pill set in the middle of a circular carpet. . . .

Worn out by fatigue, the mother embraces her dear pill and remains motionless. I shall see no more to-day. Next morning I find the Spider carrying her bag of eggs slung from her stern.

Henceforth, until the hatching, she does not leave go of the precious burden, which, fastened to the spinnerets by a short ligament, drags and bumps along the ground. With this load banging against her legs, she goes about her business, she walks or rests, she seeks her prey, attacks it and devours it. Should some accident cause the wallet to drop off it is soon replaced. The spinnerets touch it somewhere, and that is enough. Adhesion is at once restored.

The Lycosa is a stay-at-home. She never goes out except to snap up some game passing within her hunting domains, near the burrow. At the end of August, however, it is not unusual to meet her roaming about, dragging her wallet behind her. Her hesitation makes one think that she is looking for

her home, which she has left for the moment and has difficulty in finding. Why these rambles? There are two reasons: first the pairing and then the making of the pill. There is a lack of space in the burrow, which provides only room enough for the Spider engaged in long contemplation. Now the preparations for the egg bag require an extensive flooring, a supporting framework about the size of one's hand, as my caged prisoner has shown us. The Lycosa has not so much space at her disposal in her well, hence the necessity for coming out and working at her wallet in the open air, doubtless in the quiet hours of the night. The meeting with the male seems likewise to demand an excursion. Running the risk of being eaten alive, will he venture to plunge into his lady's cave, into a lair whence flight would be impossible? It is very doubtful. Prudence demands that matters should take place outside. Here at least there is some chance of beating a hasty retreat which will enable the rash swain to escape the attacks of his horrible bride.

The interview in the open air lessens the danger without removing it entirely. We had proof of this when we caught the Lycosa in the act of devouring her lover above ground, in a part of the enclosure which had been broken for planting, and which was therefore not suitable for the spider's establishment. The burrow must have been some way off, and the meeting of the pair took place at the very spot of the tragic catastrophe. Although he had a clear road, the male was not quick enough in getting away, and was duly eaten.

After this cannibal orgy, does the Lycosa go back home? Perhaps not for a while; besides, she would have to go out a second time to manufacture her pill on a level space of sufficient extent.

III

My studying of those migrating birds the hoopoes in the garden made me think of other circumstances not so happy in which I had seen them.

During my travels I have on two occasions been at sea when migration was just beginning or in full swing. I have seen hawks, owls, hoopoes, robins, swallows, nightingales, linnets, all perching on the boat together. I often wondered why, if they could fly from their far-away winter resorts in all corners of this vast Africa (those who have not had the good fortune to see so much of that continent as I have can have little idea of its immenseness) and display this wonderful migrating instinct, did they brave the dangers of the deep, when a narrow passage like the Straits of Gibraltar was close at hand. Perhaps they are helped in their decision by the wind.

A great deal of work has been done by naturalists on the subject of the migration of birds. What is it that enables birds to select so unerringly the time of year for and the direction of their flight? How do they find their way across these enormous distances which they or some of them traverse? To show what these distances are I may state that a swallow whose leg was ringed in England just before the autumn migration was found a little later in the year flying about in Cape Colony, South Africa.

There are several theories about migration, and without indicating to which of them I lean, I will

devote a few lines to giving an account of one or two of them.

As regards the marvellous bump of locality birds possess many naturalists of the older school believe this to be a divine gift. Perhaps it is, for the brain of a migrating bird dissected will be found to possess certain additional features not to be found elsewhere, and which might easily be organs of mentality connected with this bump of locality they possess in such a large measure.

Other naturalists point out that the bump of locality is in more or less measure the common possession of all creatures. We humans had it once very strongly, and in spite of the dulling effect of civilisation, which is gradually robbing us of all our instincts and making us, compared with the animals, poorish creatures, we have this bump in some measure still.

Savages have it in a marked degree. Natives of Australia, that is the aboriginal natives, can find their way across country in a manner comparable for wondering at to that of the birds. And even the Arabs in the Desert out here in Algeria have a sense of locality which compared with that possessed by us Britishers is as Niagara to a watering-can.

So much for the bird's bump of locality. Now why do they, instead of risking a trip across the sea, not chose a place such as the Straits of Gibraltar, where the sea passage is short and not dangerous ?

As I said just now, the weather has a lot to do with it. It will be noticed in this country that the majority

of the migrating birds choose a time of year when the weather is usually comparatively calm for their journey. You can see them gathering in their hundreds for that journey. In flocks they haunt the country-side, and seem even more excited than a trainload of Restall's trippers on Whit-Monday.

But the trippers have to go, wet or fine. The birds do not. They select a day when the equinoctial gales have died down, a morning when the sky is clear, there is a slight frost in the air, and the weather seems settled. Then off they go in their thousands.

Of course, they can't wait for ever for this sort of a day. But they will, within limits, delay their journey in order to get decent weather.

They hope also to get this good weather going across the sea, but are very often disappointed and pay the penalty.

Of course, migrating birds do coast along the edge of the sea a little. In the Gulf of Mexico, for instance, they have been observed doing it. But their tendency always is to take a short cut. The curve they make when coasting round such a place as the Gulf tends yearly to become shorter.

And on this point also an interesting theory has been mooted. This suggests that in ancient days, long before man made records of such things, the world's geography was very different ; the European and African shores of the Mediterranean, for instance, were very much closer to each other than they are now. And it is over this submerged land that the birds fly,

The songster's grave.

Facing page 74

following the custom instituted by their ancestors thousands and thousands of years ago, when the sea was narrow and the passage safe. But now the sea is wide, and the wind, boisterous as ever, fickle always, never to be relied on, is responsible for ending the lives of so many of our feathered friends, just as when I was in Algeria it ended the life of the great Dixmude when it was trying to get to the Sahara.

On my last voyage home from Algiers we had many migrant visitors on our ship. Unfortunately, passengers will try to feed and sailors to catch these poor tired travellers. And they are scared away from the ship, only to fall exhausted into the sea.

One day I saw two very sad sights. The wind was blowing fairly strong from the land as we were coming up the west coast of Spain. Twice somebody frightened our feathered passengers. They flew out from the ship to sea, wheeling some hundred yards away, keeping pace with the vessel at first and then vainly attempting to return.

But, alas! the wind was too strong for the weak little things. It was heart-breaking to see their efforts to get back. I really felt like jumping overboard to help them.

For ten minutes the struggle went on, sometimes the little fellows making headway and almost getting to the ship, only to be swept back by an extra cruel gust of wind.

I watched, distressed, the little victims feebly fluttering, always sinking lower and lower in the air,

till they finally dropped exhausted into the cold sea and disappeared for ever.

IV

I dare say the average person at some early period of his life has wondered if by some miracle he found himself transformed into another bit of creation what he would choose to be. Not a tree, I think, for trees can't have much fun, although they live long. Nor a fish, for in the ocean more than anywhere else in Nature it is a case of eat or be eaten.

The air is nearly as bad as the ocean in this respect. Furthermore, it offers no concealment for the weak from the sportsman or the bird of prey. Then there is the wind, which, as I have shown above, is often disastrous to birds. No, I think an animal would be perhaps the wisest choice. And if it is to be an animal, there is a great deal to be said for existence as a monkey or a baboon. For, taken on the whole, the average monkey does not have a bad life. He can walk, run, climb, jump. He gets plenty of food, plenty of society. The risks he runs from other species are perhaps less than the average. Above all, he is endowed with a healthy curiosity, and that alone makes for long life and happiness.

These reflections came to me more than once while visiting the Algerian baboons. I made several short expeditions into the mountains on the way to Bous-saada with a view to securing pictures of these baboons,

who come down into the beautiful gorges of the Chiffa. There are several small groups of baboons living on the Atlas Mountains, and when the tops of the ranges have become covered with snow, then one gets the opportunity of studying the behaviour of these interesting little fellows, for they then seek the more temperate climate of the gorges.

First in the troupe you have the chief baboon, whose word or action is law; then there are the females, some with babies; and then the other men and children of the troupe, all of which have to obey the chief. I watched specimens of all of them with care, and got a fairly good insight into the social life of the clan.

When two lady baboons have a squabble the old chief intervenes and quickly smoothes matters over. But if the quarrellers be two males it is a different story. I have seen a great big chief baboon chase one of the offending parties—let us hope it was the one in the wrong—for a couple of hundred yards.

I love to see the mothers nursing their babies, nose to nose, apparently gossiping hard. Baboons appear almost as fond of gossip as Arabs, and no doubt the forest has its scandals just as has the Arab town. And probably baboons are just as much given to taking away each others' character as are human beings.

They are intelligent, too, are these Algerian baboons. One morning I arrived at their home in the gorge pretty early. Not a sign of one could I see, although it was their time to be out and about. Looking skywards after waiting some time, I saw something

that explained the matter. About fifteen or sixteen vultures on the hunt were wheeling round and round, getting lower and lower, whilst three or four more vultures were sitting on a rock not far away. I am sure they were after any baby baboon that happened to stray. And, apparently, all the members of the troupe thought as I did. They were sitting tight.

After waiting for another half-hour the vultures rose into the air, wheeled round a few times and made off. The troupe gave them some fifteen minutes to get right away, then they began to show themselves.

I had a hearty laugh when one baboon came out close to me. He was apparently not aware of my presence. So, rounding my lips, I imitated the sucking noise a vulture makes with his wings, at which the baboon made frantic over-head waves with his hand, while his head turned in every direction as he searched for the vultures. That head went round and round almost as if the owner had a rubber neck.

The sight reminded me of a little incident which happened to myself in East Africa. That big game hunter, the late George Outram, who was recently killed by a lion, was with me in a scrap with the Germans on the other side of Lake Victoria. We had been sent to see after some ammunition which porters were carrying to the fight. Two snipers got busy on us. We each found a stone about a yard high and took cover behind it. From the hospital in the little town a mile away, which we were attacking, the enemy fired a gun. The first shell came whistling over us

and dropped some thirty yards away, but the second ploughed into the ground some seven or eight feet from me.

I had two alternatives, to go or stay. Choosing the latter, I popped round to the other side of the stone, quick as a lizard. At once the snipers had a go at me. So as the shell had not exploded I popped back round my stone again, and much to my relief the shell proved to be a dud. I didn't think the situation at all a funny one. But Outram did. He yelled with laughter, dubbed me on the spot "The Man with the Rubber Neck," declaring that my head went completely round on my shoulders as I looked for the shell and the snipers.

Well, I may have a rubber neck. One needs it when photographing wild life all over the world. A monkey with a camera would get some pretty interesting results.

I was very much amused to see the antics of the younger members of the troupe I was watching. Three or four of them would come down on to a ledge of rock sticking out of the side of the hill, and start playing. The game they played was a form of tag or touch-me-last. Often it ended in a squabble, and then the mothers intervened. They did not have a slipper handy, but they chastised their youngsters "good and often" as the Americans say. If the punished one began to yell up rushed the old chief, who took it in his arms. Then all three would cuddle up together for quite half a minute, after which the old chief—wise

man—would walk off as if he had suddenly remembered he was wanted elsewhere.

One pretty scene took place right in front of the camera, the actors being a mother and her baby. Baby wanted breakfast, and mother said "No." Baby persisted and finally got smacked. Baby then cried and mother took compassion on it and fed it. Soon baby was satisfied. He then commenced to examine his mother's mouth, nose and eyebrows. I was lucky enough to get a good cine record of this. Among these baboons, as in the animal world generally, the babies appear to be well looked after.

I noticed that when a quarrel started over some trivial matter the couple who were quarrelling would face each other, sometimes holding hands and keeping up a movement with the mouth, or what might be called a silent gibber, sometimes putting their faces close together as if they were inviting each other to mortal combat. But I never saw a fight come off, I am glad to say, for such a fight must be a savage business. They have terrible hands and teeth, these baboons, and, I should imagine, very strong jaws. But perhaps they don't fight, merely threaten to. I never saw on a single member any signs of damage such as fighting would leave.

One troupe have found out that baboons are well-treated by the owner of the land hereabouts and by visitors to his little rest-spot at the bottom of the gorge. So they hang about the locality. But on no account will they allow any of the other troupes on

Suspicious vultures.

A study in expressions.

Facing page 80.

the mountains to visit the place when they are there. And if a couple of strangers happen to be at the rest-spot when they arrive three or four of the troupe will give chase, and away flee the two intruders up the mountain-side, shouting for all they are worth, until presently they are lost to sight among the trees. All in a troupe have a wholesome regard for the old chief, who is always by far the largest of its members, so much bigger than the others that you cannot mistake him.

These baboons are of a different species from those in Central or Southern Africa. As compared with the Central African baboon, the number in a troupe is small. I have seen as many as one hundred and fifty baboons in one troupe in Central Africa. The antics of the Central African baboons were much the same as these Algerian ones, but they are not nearly so tame, due to the fact, I suppose, that they have so many enemies.

The mountain homes of these little fellows I was watching are quite cold and half the time enveloped in mist. One strange thing I noticed, and that was the comparative absence of bird life in the country where these baboons live. I saw no birds there, with the solitary exception of a robin, who hopped round amongst the baboons apparently without any fear, and not even a mischievous young baboon attempted to touch it.

Among the many methods of securing wild animals alive for exhibition is that of shooting the mother and capturing the helpless young one waiting beside her

dead body. Here the young one is taken care of, if you can call it so. But what of the little baby baboon whose mother dies in the forest ? Would the others of the troupe adopt it ?

I have read stories in the newspapers of animals of different species mothering young ones of another, but in my boyhood days on the mountains of North Yorkshire we often had great difficulty to get an ewe who had lost her offspring to mother one of the twins from another sheep. She would have quickly killed her foster lamb, if it had not been for the fact that a little deception was practised. We used to take the skin off the dead lamb and stitch it roughly on to the foster one, when the mother took to it at once.

I wonder what happens in the case of a little motherless monkey.

The scenery of the Chiffa Gorge is certainly magnificent and in parts might be mistaken for that of North Wales, except that the prevailing colour of the rocks is red. Roads have been built along the steep mountain sides, roads which I should not advise a nervous person to traverse in a car driven by a reckless chauffeur, for the corners are awful. These roads are a triumph of French engineering and a monument to the successful overcoming of terrible difficulties. The heavy rains of the mountains cause frequent landslides, and the prevailing rock—rotten stone it is called—is soft and cannot be relied on.

It was as early as 1842 that the French first tackled with their soldiers the task of building these roads.

After making about forty miles of road they came across an enormous rock which threatened to fall. They brought up cannon and battered it away. Now the railroad runs through the gorges.

The road beside the winding river is full of interest. At every bend fresh views, each more beautiful than the last, are presented to the beholder. Rugged precipices frown on either side. The soil of the gorge, what there is of it, seems to be extremely fertile. Shrubs sprout from crevices of the rock. Trees grow wherever a patch of earth affords a little nourishment; oaks, cork trees, chestnuts, wild olives are among the most numerous. For the rest the deep sloping sides are a confusion of wild vegetation, landslides, rushing streams, dripping rocks fringed with maidenhair fern, rivulets with here and there a beautiful cascade.

Along the bottom of the gorge the river winds, a clear stream in a bed of rounded stones and picturesquely scattered rocks. And the gorges, in spite of their steep sides and comparative inaccessibility, are inhabited—by a branch of that industrious race the Kabyles. There will be seen in the more cultivated parts evidences of skilful husbandry. Fig trees, peach trees, orange trees flourish. There are pomegranates and small vineyards. Altogether the Chiffa Gorges are delightful, and I congratulate my friends the baboons on the intelligent manner in which they have selected their winter quarters.

Whether the Kabyle likes them as neighbours

is another matter. For baboons are great hands at robbing orchards. However, so far as I could learn nobody had a bad word to say for these interesting fellows. They have even christened a brook after them—Ruisseau des Singes is the name of it—The Stream of the Monkeys. The water babbles noisily over the stones; the surrounding shrubs and trees are delicately green; and close by are orchards, famous in the neighbourhood. What more can a romantic baboon want?

Chapter III

THE EDGE OF THE DESERT

I

THROUGH gorges, past the home of my baboons, over snow-capped mountains, past vineyards, past gardens full of bougainvillea, yellow gorse and many other flowers, lies the way to Bous-saada.

The green, rocky mountain land is soon left behind, with its roses, olives, firs and fig trees. Here vegetation grows ever sparser and the atmosphere ever hotter. And then all of a sudden you find yourself in summer weather. That is, I did so on my first visit to Bous-saada. On my second the weather was bitterly cold. Down into the plain with its silver streams you rush, and through this plain on the track which is to bring you to the Desert.

Very different are the people we see here from the Kabyles we have left behind in the mountains. Here was at last the Arab of the Desert. We pass samples of him, stately men, their flowing burnouses blown out in the wind, other lesser men whose brown thin legs twinkle in the sunshine as they walk along. Scarcely a woman is to be seen now. Above there on the heights women were plentiful on the way. The Arab keeps his women-folk as much as possible indoors.

And now comes our first view of the Desert, with its hillocks, its varied lights, its shimmering haze, its billowing sands stretching away for miles to the hard horizon. The soil we are traversing now is sandy earth, strewn with boulders. At our side on a rocky hill stand a white wall and some mud towers, which perhaps in former days was a watch tower or fort. The look of the country hereabouts is very desolate. Even the green lands we have left behind bear when we glance back at them a dreary appearance, as if parched and yellowed by the sun.

Far away hills and table-land show to the left. Their weird architecture is in thorough keeping with the scene. Ahead the road runs through the last of the belt where mountain soil blends into the everlasting silent sands.

Bous-saada—which being translated means "Place of Happiness"—is one of the most beautiful of the oasis towns, and in years gone by was an Arab stronghold. It lies in a horseshoe-shaped cup among most weirdly-formed mountains, and is famous among the world of artists, not because of its picturesqueness, although it is very picturesque, or of the grandeur of its surroundings, although these are sublime, but because of its light.

This light is wonderful. It results from the absolute freedom from moisture of the air and the position of the place itself on the very edge of the Desert. Italian light is dull compared with it. The shadows cast by the sun here are ebony-black. You are conscious

of this almost living light as you walk along the fringe of the hills. It seems a something almost solid. The glare of the Desert is intolerable.

Many artists visit the place to try and put on to canvas the wonderful light effects that are to be seen here. The town is unique in Algeria. At this part of the country mountain and Desert meet, and it is in the ramparts of the red, misshapen mountains, next to the ochre-coloured Desert, where a shallow stream meandering among boulders gives nourishment to a forest of date palms, that Bous-saada has been built.

Brown, mud-built, flat-topped, windowless houses, standing irregularly at the sides of a network of tortuous streets, where in summer the heat is suffocating, the flies omnipresent, the shadows inky, together with shops and a stately mosque or so comprise the Arab town. There are several thousand Arabs here, men who get their living out of travellers and out of the Desert. Camellers some of them, hardy, thick-set fellows in coarse burnouses with big feet and brown hard legs, others merchants, date sellers, men belonging to the hundred and one occupations which exist in a small way in all Arab and other towns. You may often see their women-folk washing clothes in the meagre river, on this my second visit almost dry. You may see their children at play in the street. Their donkeys, goats, and camels are in evidence everywhere.

Beside the Arabs there are in Bous-saada several hundred Jews. The Jew, the old male Jew that is, wears big pantaloons and a sort of zouave jacket.

The young Jew affects European costume. His womenfolk walk the street unveiled, wearing curious headdresses, and are fonder of decking themselves with jewellery than any folk in Bous-saada.

Bous-saada is a typical oasis town. Even in the cold weather you are reminded always that you are dwelling on the fringe of the Desert. You see it stretching away into space before you in the daytime. You see the tents of the Bedouin, the goats, the camels. And nightly when in your hotel you hear the plaintive wail of the Arab flute, and the rhythmic throb of the Arab drums, a music in a minor key that seems to rend your heart-strings.

To these tunes you know that the Ouled Naïls are dancing.

Or rather I should have said the Almees, for that is the name of the special class of women dancers whom the Ouled Naïls and other Desert tribes send in their youth to the towns fringing the Desert to earn money for themselves and their relations.

These women, to persons of certain tastes, are one of the chief attractions of Biskra and Bous-saada. Their bodies are lithe and graceful, their complexions, artificially yellowed, are darker than those of gypsies. Of morals they have none. Of jewellery plenty. In fact, they cover themselves with jewellery, some of the more popular ones wearing small fortunes on their not invariably pretty persons.

Most of the jewellery is of native manufacture, of a type which before the war could be purchased

very cheaply in the country districts of Algeria. Anklets beaten out by a hammer and engraved with a simple engraving tool, sequins in plenty—sometimes the Almees wear only sequins, necklaces of beads. Filigree work brooches, ear-rings of similar workmanship, chains made of silver wire, these form the contents of the jewel box of the average Ouled Naïl girl in the dance houses of Biskra and Bous-saada.

The poor Arab and hill women are content with silver jewellery.

The Arab custom is to buy the silver in the bar and take it to the silversmiths for manufacture. The latter gentleman does his work with very crude tools, squatting in some small, badly-lighted hut, with a gas-pipe blower, a bellows made of skin and an earthern hearth. He casts with the molten metal brooches, ear-rings and anklets, using a mould made of a mixture of sand and oil, a mould made in two halves just as an English iron-moulder's mould is made. The chain, filigree and similar work is beaten out from the bar. The silversmith does not charge a big price for his services, and so Arab beauties manage to get a good collection of jewellery comparatively cheaply. Of course, most of the Ouled Naïls get theirs for nothing. But that is by the way.

One common ornament worn by nearly every Almee is a jewelled dog's tooth. Another is a "hand." Both of these are worn to shield the owner from the "Evil Eye."

The effects of the "Evil Eye" are much dreaded

in North Africa, as indeed they are in every semi-civilised and savage country. In the wilder parts of Siamese Malaya unoffending men said to possess the "Evil Eye" and blamed for the continued failure of the paddy crop in their particular district are shot down frequently by their neighbours, a silver bullet being always used.

A simpler way of protecting oneself is to point the right hand with fingers extended towards the "Evil Eye" feared. If this is done quickly all will be well. As it may happen that an "Evil Eye" gets busy without being observed, it is as well to have one's fingers extended always. So to wear a brooch made in the shape of a hand with fingers extended is the sovereign remedy against the "Evil Eye."

It may be remarked here that it is not the "Evil Eye" itself that does the damage, but rather a lot of little invisible devils that fly along the beam cast by it. The sight of a fierce-looking thing frightens these devils off. So as an additional precaution a dog's tooth pendant may be worn.

Finally, if to these two ornaments is added a piece of red coral the wearer will be absolutely safe. The little devils avoid red coral like the plague !

These brooches, bracelets, anklets, collars, necklaces, pendants and other trinkets made of silver and worn by the ordinary woman, Almees of the Ouled Naïl copy in gold. Some of them are not averse from precious stones either, as a cursory inspection of the Biskra dance houses will reveal to those interested.

Golden hoop ear-rings are one of the favourite adornments of the Ouled Naïl dancers. They plaster their hair with grease and wear the most gorgeous coloured costumes.

The colour of the costume which the Almee wears when dancing is very often mauve. Her favourite head-dress is black studded with gold like the sky on a Desert night. It is a costume modest enough. But the skilled Eastern dancer can if she wishes make any costume, even a potato sack, the vehicle for suggestiveness.

In the daytime they live in their own quarter of the town. At night they frequent the Moorish cafés and dance. And they can dance! They love it, spare themselves nothing, put every little bit of soul they have into the movement, until the Arab spectators squatting around them in the café in the haze of native tobacco smoke, intoxicated by the music and the poetry of the motion and the strange, alluring scents and the languorous, passionate look in the dancer's eyes, break into tumultuous applause and give the dancers what they ask.

To my mind the best of the Almees dances is a sort of unrestrained Spanish bolero which they execute with quickness and delicacy. Connoisseurs, however, I believe, prefer what is known as the "Stomach Dance," a dance which the supple hips of the Almees enables them to perform to perfection. This rhythmic motion of the hips, together with that of the arms and hands, even down to the nails (which are steeped in

henna) produces, I understand, in those interested in that kind of thing a poetic feeling of satisfaction.

I made a little study of the head of one of these dancing girls, reputed to be the most beautiful in Algeria, who I found out afterwards was but fifteen years of age. Apparently the working life of an Almee begins early, like that of most Eastern women.

It is not easy, I discovered, to get at these people to photograph them. They are not allowed out of the dancing houses and their own quarter. I had to get permission from the French commandant to photograph this conceited young lady.

This one's jewellery, as will be seen, consisted of real gold coins strung round as a necklet. For vanity I have never met her equal. And she had something to be vain about, for she was an accomplished dancer and a really lovely specimen.

Down in the river bed, with the exception of a few small pools and a trickle of water, now quite dry, I saw at least three artists at work. One I found was from England, one from America, and another from France.

By the river also I saw what I had seen in the Outer Hebrides many years ago. The washer-women I mentioned above were washing clothes with their feet. I saw, too, another woman washing raw dirty wool. When she had finished the wool was a beautiful snow white.

In the town I saw women spinning this wool and afterwards weaving it into cloth. The finished article

The beautiful dancing girl.

Facing page 92.

is washed again, the washing being started with the hands and finished with the feet.

I had heard a great deal about the famous fights between lizards and horned vipers at Bous-saada and naturally wished to witness one. With this end in view I got in touch with an Arab named Abdulla. He turned out a splendid fellow, intellectual, straightforward, and most courteous. But he could not show me the fight I wanted to see. For one thing the weather was cold and the lizards were probably hibernating some ten feet down in the sands, and for another thing apparently lizards were now scarce in Bous-saada. There used to be a lot of lizards there. But somebody in England discovered that lizard skin has a commercial value. Jews at once arrived at Bous-saada in great numbers and offered the Arabs a good price to collect lizard skins. These Jews, when the real article became scarce and expensive, bought up all the crudely stuffed lizards the Arabs had by them for sale to tourists.

I tried very hard to get one of these lizards, but the weather continued cold. I actually took a few feet of film of a snowstorm during this last visit to Bous-saada.

After the snowstorm the weather got brighter. We dug deep down in an effort to get a lizard, and never found a sign of one. Wind had long before this obliterated any lizard tracks there might have been in the sand. Our digging was done almost by guesswork and we soon gave it up.

In these wonderful fights arranged by Arabs between a horned viper and the lizard the lizard nearly always wins, in spite of the viper's deadly poison. The reason is that the lizard has no blood circulation, and the poison from the viper's fangs remains in one part of the body and does little or no damage.

On the hillside and around Bous-saada are hundreds of graves, where womenfolk are always to be found mourning some of the departed. The Arabs reverence the dead, burying them simply as we do, except in the case of men of mark or great holiness, when the tomb is often costly and elaborate.

Humanity is much the same all the world over. Grief for the dead, joy at a wedding, joy at a birth. All these emotions you may witness among the Arabs of Algeria. But the Arab woman, it may be said here, derives no joy from the birth of a daughter. If she has one daughter she may be forgiven. But on a repetition of the offence her lord and master is apt to exhibit considerable annoyance. I have known husbands in England, especially in the farming districts, behave in much the same manner.

Here at Bous-saada I saw a very homely sight, namely some fifteen to twenty Arab boys playing hockey in the street with strikers made from branches of the date palm. Another use for this wonderful tree! If the players had been clad in European clothes you could not have told the difference between a match at home and this match in the Desert. On the Arab

New Year's Day all the Arabs play the hockey game, and they must all hit the ball or stone for luck.

From Bous-saada I journeyed back through another portion of the Atlas Mountains, striking the railway at Bordj on my way to Constantine. I cannot allow the journey to pass without expressing my appreciation of the wonderful scenery provided and of the good, well-built roads that the French have cut in the sides of the rocks and hills in order to make travelling easy.

The steppes of these parts of Algeria are not always barren, except where the sand is loose, and thriving herbage covers the ground at a certain season of the year. Then is the time that the Bedouin Arabs arrive to graze their flocks.

The tent is the dwelling of these people. They bring with them flocks of sheep and goats and herds of camels. Of the last up to three hundred head have been counted in one herd.

The young camels run by the side of their dams. They are pretty little creatures, the exact image in miniature of the full-grown animal, graceful in movement, and full of fun. The flocks are not allowed by their owners to graze where they please. Each tribe and sub-division of a tribe has its own area assigned to it for pasturing. The wealth of a pastoral Arab is derived principally from the wool of his flocks, and of course a year when herbage is scarce is disastrous to him.

II

Few people who visit Algeria and the Sahara Desert ever give the camel a thought. They glance at him as they would at a building, and pass on. In the minds of such people the camel is just a bit of the machinery of the Desert. So he may be. But still, he is worth studying.

An interesting thing about the camel is the fact that he can go many days without water. He is able to do this owing to his internal construction. He possesses a three-chambered stomach. This is known as the paunch. In the walls of this stomach are little cells in which can be stored a great quantity of water. If the human race was constructed in a similar fashion there would not be such an outcry against closing the public houses on Sunday.

The camel used all over the Sahara is the Arabian camel. The long-haired gentleman seen in many parts of Asia is a shorter-legged, uglier-looking specimen than his Arabian cousin and appears to be more or less a descendant of the original camel whose fossil remains have been found in Russia and other places. For camels existed in the earliest ages, and since the time of memory have been known as domesticated animals, valued by man.

The Arabian camel is a very stout-built fellow, splendidly constructed for carrying loads. His slit-like nostrils are interesting, for at will he can close them, which is a great convenience during a sandstorm,

for instance. His hump was supposed at one time to store water, but this is not the case. But it has its uses. It stores fat.

A camelman always carefully looks at this hump if a long journey is in front of him. To him it is an indication of his animal's fitness to endure long working hours and short rations, conditions which generally tend to increase the size of the "hump" with which the well-known species, *homo sapiens*, is often afflicted. When food runs short the camel with the big hump lasts much longer than his brother with a small one.

Much confusion exists in some minds as to which is a camel and which is a dromedary. Some old books tell you that a camel has one hump, a dromedary two. This is wrong. A camel may have either one or two humps. The dromedary is the camel of more than average swiftness, and is kept for racing.

One day I asked my guide why my camel looked so supercilious. His answer was because he can see the other camel's hump but cannot see his own.

Certainly the camel is in appearance a stuck-up looking creature, always willing to cut you dead. And if ever an animal can look through you as if you weren't there it is he. And yet within that quiet, aristocratic-looking exterior there beats a heart and exists a character similar in some respects to that of his man possessor. You ought to see him—from a distance—when, for instance, he falls in love. At these times he blows a sort of bubble out of his mouth, at the same time making an unearthly noise. This

acquaints everybody around with the fact that he is in love. But love does not make the camel the sweet-natured, gentle creature it does the average insurance clerk, say. No, the camel in love is a dangerous creature, and the wise man keeps out of his way. I wonder what the actuary of an insurance company would say if, as he was passing through the office, one of the clerks emitted a bubble from his mouth, made an unearthly noise and bit him. Of course, the actuary would probably be covered by his insurance policy; but still, it would be rather unpleasant for him.

The female camel scarcely ever gives birth to more than one at a time. I overtook the rear portion of a caravan one evening, and found a camel and a newly-born, with a couple of Arabs standing by. In answer to my inquiry one of the Arabs said to me they had been travelling for many hours, and he was not aware of the mother's condition. I waited to see how long it took before the baby camel got on its feet and could travel. In just over the half-hour it had suckled and walked off with its mother.

This reminded me of a charming incident I witnessed behind Mount Kenya in Central Africa. I had watched a female oryx drop out of a herd. A bull noticed her also and dropped out of the herd too. He waited some few yards away until her baby was born and got on its feet. At once all three made off on their way to rejoin the herd, which in the meantime had disappeared from view. I thought this was one of the prettiest little scenes I had ever witnessed in the animal world.

The gossips.

Mother and son.

Facing page 98.

The baby camel is about three feet high when born. He is a taking little chap, as are nearly all young animals, and his mother treats him with great affection, suckling him for nearly a year. He grows till he is about sixteen, and if not worked too hard will with luck live till he is fifty or sixty years old.

The Arabs treat their camels well, but are sometimes inclined to overload them. But if the load is in the camel's opinion really too heavy he refuses to rise and tells you all about it. In this respect the camel is like the llama of Peru, an animal in its way as useful in its part of the world as the camel is in Algeria.

I say Algeria, but of course, as everyone knows, where you find desert country there you usually find the camel. He has been used for some time in Western Australia, and for carrying wool down from the ranches to the coast has completely displaced the horse.

Camels I have seen right down as far as Nairobi, and one day, wandering in the native quarters of Mombasa, I happened to look into a dark, horrible, evil-smelling shed, when I saw a couple of poor, miserable-looking camels going round and round working a couple of grinding mills for oil. They were being treated much more cruelly by the Indians than they were ever likely to have been in the Desert.

The camel is an animal especially built for the Desert. If ever a creature was fitted for his environment he is. His internal watering tank and his energy storing hump have been mentioned above. In addition to these he possesses a long neck, a strong hard mouth,

and teeth useful for gathering and masticating Desert food, feet like velvet pads, just right for traversing the sand and rocks without slipping, a hide like a walrus, and a stomach which nine-tenths of our millionaires would give half their fortunes to own the equal of.

A camel can digest anything almost under the sun. One of its favourite foods in Algeria is halfa-grass, a rush common in the waste-places of the country, another is a kind of wild aloe.

But he can eat thorn branches, date palm leaves, and the coarsest of grasses and thistles, and, most wonderful of all, he seems to like the foliage of the prickly pear, a plant introduced from America into Algeria and now much used there for making hedges.

A man who knows what a prickly pear leaf is will come away with a great reverence for a camel's stomach when he learns he can digest such an article.

In addition to all this the camel loves the heat, and in the most torrid of days in the Desert prefers to kneel in the sun rather than seek shelter in the shade. In fact, he sometimes affords a useful shelter for his master both from the sun and from the sand storms.

Sitting in the public gardens of Biskra one evening, my eye was attracted by a curious load on a fine camel as it passed us. The movement of the load was what drew my attention. On making inquiry, I found it was the dead body of a man that the camel was

carrying. He had just been killed by a camel who had bitten him through the abdomen.

The murderer was ordered to be executed. Some said he was mad. But others said that, although so docile and affectionate, the camel, if ill-used at any time, would revenge a wrong.

This incident of the camel-murderer reminded me of other animals, the elephant in particular, who will remember cruelty for a long time and at a given moment repay it. I have known animals wait for years before they thought the time had arrived. Or perhaps it is a sudden recollection of past ill-usage which upsets their balance for a moment, and the deed is done.

And if the camel and the elephant are alike in this characteristic of waiting long for revenge, they are also alike in other respects. They have the same dignity of movement, the same docility and teachability. Some people nowadays think that this willingness to perform mechanical tasks like clockwork is an evidence in the elephant of stupidity. If the elephant were as intelligent as the monkey, they say, he would utterly refuse to do the work he does. And they say that he exhibits no intelligence even in doing this work. An elephant, they point out as an instance, when engaged in piling logs will, when the bell sounds for dinner-time, drop the log he has hold of like a red-hot brick and make off for the stable. This log may have taken him quite a time to get so far towards the top of the pile and dropping it means half an hour's work lost. If the

elephant were intelligent, they argue, he would do the extra minutes' work necessary to get the log to the top of the pile before stopping work.

Of course, in practice those in charge of the log piling never ring the bell till all the elephants have put the log they happen to be engaged on in its place.

But I don't think this is a particularly good instance to adduce of the elephant's stupidity. It might mean rather that he possesses strong trade-union tendencies.

A camel, too, I admit, works very mechanically, and often does what appears to be very unintelligent things, as I suppose most animals would if they were engaged year in and out up to fifteen hours a day—that is the walking day on a trip across the Desert—on the same hard, hot, mechanical tasks as the camel.

But stupid as the camel may appear to be, and stupid as we may think he looks, he at times exhibits quite other characteristics.

I may digress here to say that there is a universal tendency among us humans to consider any person or animal who works hard for us stupid.

The domestic servant or "skivvy," as some so contemptuously call her, was a universal laughing-stock. I say "was" because now she is almost extinct. Every business boy or girl laughed at her, and her mistress was wont to spend nearly every afternoon giving other mistresses instances of her rank inferiority and unendurable stupidity. She could hardly get a sweetheart, so contemptuously was her occupation regarded,

and contributors to the various comic papers made fortunes by producing witticisms derogatory to her. You see, she was one of the creatures who could not hit back.

Neither can the elephant hit back, nor the camel. But sometimes both of these animals rebel, just as the "skivvy" has. Elephants run amok. Camels stampede, savage their attendants, have to be brought to reason. An angry camel jumping over the sand with an Arab camel-breaker clinging to his back and hitting him over the head with a stick is a sight worth seeing. The cow-boy on a buck-jumper forms a vastly inferior spectacle.

And when the rebellious creature is tamed he goes back to his work in the file and is regarded as stupid !

Personally I don't think the camel stupid. A camel to me is really a most wonderful and patient animal. I always feel amused at his shouts in the morning when he is going to be loaded, and I don't blame him for shouting, for the Arab loads him very heavily. Very often on hearing him shouting outside you would swear it was some old lion disgusted with himself for having spent all night out and got nothing to eat. Camels are very gentle animals, and affectionate if well treated. Mine knew me better than some other animals I have had.

I am remembering at the moment an old elephant I had with me for six weeks in the jungle of India, and having been nearly killed by wild elephants before I had anything to do with a tame one, I had a sort of

feeling against her. Still, this old lady used to come round and see me every morning before I started out. She knew where there was a little bit of sugar or other titbit! And we became great friends, so much so that I could go out with her into the jungle by myself without her driver.

At all times in the Desert I have had camels with whom I have struck up still closer friendships.

The following is what that celebrated naturalist, the late Rev. J. G. Wood, says about the animal :—

This curious water-storing power of the Camel has often proved to be the salvation of its owner. It has happened that, when travellers have been passing over the Desert, their supply of water has been exhausted, partly by the travellers and partly by the burning heat which causes it to evaporate through the pores of the goat-skin bottle in which it was carried. Then the next well, where they had intended to refill the skins and refresh themselves, has proved dry, and the whole party seemed doomed to die of thirst.

Under these circumstances only one chance of escape is left them. They kill a camel, and from its stomach they procure water enough to sustain life for a little longer, and perhaps enable them to reach a well or fountain in which water still remains. The water which is thus obtained is unaltered except by a greenish hue, the result of mixing with the remains of herbage in cells. It is, of course, very disagreeable, but those who are dying from thirst cannot afford to be fastidious, and to them the water is a most delicious draught.

It is rather curious that, if any of the water which is taken out of a dead Camel can be kept a few days, both the green hue and the unpleasant flavour disappear, and the water becomes fresh, clear and limpid. So wonderfully well do the internal cells preserve the water, that after a camel has

Thirsty camels.

Facing page 104.

been dead for ten days—and in that hot climate ten days is equal to a month in England—the water within it has been quite pure and drinkable.

III

We travelled mostly during the night on our journey from Bordj. One of my fellow-passengers was a Frenchman who had, he informed me, a farm near Constantine. The other, an English visitor who was going to see the Desert.

On the way the farmer related some wonderful stories to my fellow-passenger about the Desert and its deadly inhabitants. There were instances of men, he said, who had been chased by snakes with manes, snakes which could travel faster than a horse. Other instances where the snake, of a different kind, laid quiet, then jumped out and bit the victim's nose. Others again where you found the snake in bed with you in the morning. So vividly and forcibly did the Frenchman tell his snake stories that the tourist turned round to me and said: "This Desert must be a devil of a place!"

I looked across at the farmer and inquired if he had ever been on the Desert. He said no, but that a friend of his had. So, desirous of learning something not hearsay, I asked him about the place where he lived.

He told me of a lion that had been killed there last year. This lion had wandered far to the north of its usual haunts. That he had had great trouble with

wild boar which ruined his crops, and porcupine. I believe this farmer's tales about the boars and porcupines, but decline to credit his snake stories. It reminded me of a man who came from South Africa in the nineties and his snake stories. So many snakes did he assert there were on the veldt that a friend of mine said very seriously to me one day, after reading in the daily papers of a heavy shelling in the Boer War, "My word, they must have killed thousands of A——'s snakes!"

We three, what with stories, snoozing, and general reminiscing, got through the night very pleasantly. I noted when dawn came that the land we were running through was much more cultivated than that which we had left behind.

Chapter IV

THE ROMAN CITIES

I

THE train from Bordj stopped at Setif, where I had already spent a night on my first visit to Algiers. Setif was then a walled-in city with a big gate which was banged to after I had entered. I have still memories of a bed there which I never slept in. Great changes have been made in the place since the Roman city, Sitifis, was discovered not far away. Judging from what I heard this time, Sitifis bids fair to surpass anything yet seen in the way of ancient cities in Africa.

After we had passed El Guarro, the junction where you change to go down to the Desert, I began to notice some of my feathered friends, the storks in particular. The storks were nesting on the roofs of low houses against chimneys, or on church steeples, or on any other odd place which took their fancy. Other storks I saw wandering in the swampy ground looking for a meal. These birds add in my estimation to the beauty and interest of any town.

The mountainous country and the valleys around Constantine is one of the strongholds of those interesting people the Kabyles.

The Kabyles, that is the purer tribes of them, are

to be distinguished from the Arabs by their somewhat paler complexions, and also by their costume. They do not universally wear the burnous, and often go about bare-headed and bare-footed. They are a mixed race, the purest blooded of them being found in the Aurés Mountains near Batna. As with other mountain races, the more inaccessible the mountains to the conqueror the purer the race. Those Kabyles one sees in the Biskra district, for instance, are difficult to distinguish from Arabs.

The Kabyle language varies with the part of the country just as Scotch varies from English. But all Kabyles are able to understand each other. It is considered by many authorities that the language they speak was that spoken by the Carthaginians.

In character the Kabyle is a typical mountaineer. He is tough, tenacious and very independent. Above all, he desires to be free. In the days when they used to go to war every man capable of bearing arms went to the front. And very tough people they were to meet in the field.

Their form of government was very loose. Each village selected its own chief, and these chiefs selected a chief of the Kabyles for the whole district.

In those days might was the only law among the tribes of Algeria. The Kabyle is a born fighter, and loves nothing better than "keeping his hand in." In the old days young and enterprising Kabyles were accustomed to take up the profession of mercenary soldier. Some of them fought for the French against

Stork.

Facing page 108.

the Arabs, whom they hold in contempt. The French "Zouave" Regiment is named after the Zouaan, a Kabyle tribe which had never submitted to the Turks.

There is no more fighting to be done by the Algerian Kabyles now. Under the beneficent rule of the French their homes are safe, and they can cultivate their fields without fear of molestation. Their farming methods are primitive. Some of the old Roman artists whose frescoes illustrate a man at the plough might have taken the present-day Kabyle as a model.

He has, in pursuit of his favourite calling, come down into the valleys and plains, and Kabyle settlements exist now everywhere in Northern Algeria. In the fertile and sometimes unfertile places which he has chosen to develop his red-roofed villages are thick on every hill-top, sometimes as many as thirty can be counted within a small radius.

You enter one of these villages and you find it a little squalid. The huts are of mud, with pointed, scarlet-tiled roofs. There are yards where cattle and dyed sheep are penned, and the streets are rough and abound in stones and pools of mud. Kabyle men, all of them comparatively pale-complexioned—some are even red-headed—lounge about near you, dressed, most of them, in rough, low-necked, sack-like garments. The eternal goat poses for you in the foreground. While from behind, barking furiously, charges at you the ubiquitous Kabyle dog.

And big-eyed, half-naked children, and old hags in nondescript attire come and offer you things for sale.

The women you see are all of them unveiled, and their head-dresses and loose robes are of the most brilliant colours. Some of the younger of them are very good-looking.

A Kabyle beauty in gala attire is a sight worth remembering. She will probably have on a very gaudy gown, striped red and ochre. Her arms will be bare and adorned with silver bangles. And her body and head-dress will be covered with necklaces, brooches, chains, and other silver ornaments. Huge hooped ear-rings complete the costume.

My thought when I got to my destination, Constantine, was : " What a wonderful place ! "

Constantine, the ancient capital of the Numidian kings, whose name was given to it by the Emperor Constantine in A.D. 312, stands on one of the noblest sites, perhaps, in the whole world. The gigantic limestone rock on which the lovely city is built is an island except on the western side. The Ouled Rummel runs round three parts of it in a deep ravine, the sides of which in some places are only a few yards away from each other. Bridges, both natural and artificial, connect these sides.

This noble city, with its huddled houses, cupolas, spires and minarets, standing on its isolated rock, as if impregnable, in the middle of the wild, sweeping plain

Constantine : bridge over gorge.

(*Below it is a natural bridge, and under that the river.*)

Facing page 110.

in the glare of the African sun is one of the finest sights in the world.

The French after great difficulties stormed it in 1837. Its inhabitants had up to then looked upon it as untakeable. "Who spits on the wings of the crows in their flight," they said, "need fear no enemies."

But they were wrong. Arab memories are notoriously short. In spite of its position, the city has frequently yielded to the assault of the enemy. It is true that the Vandals and others in their time tried to capture it without success. But various Arab generals looted it. And it was taken and re-taken by the Turks.

Of course, it is a city worth possessing, a natural fortress, containing many fine mosques and public buildings, a large population and great wealth.

Constantine's statue stands outside the railway station, and he gets, I suppose, the credit with many for founding the city. But he did not found it. The Numidians were there before him. In fact, it is one of those natural fortresses on which people have probably resided since the Flood.

To be in the city when the sun dips and see the Arabs at their devotions among the débris of broken columns and other remains of a much older and mightier civilisation than theirs is to get an object lesson of what vicissitudes the cities of the world have undergone.

Constantine has been in the hands of a dozen nationalities, Kabyles, Turks, Arabs, Carthaginians,

Romans and now the French. To the Romans Constantine was a place of the first importance. When the French, after their occupation, constructed their barracks, excavators discovered extensive Roman cisterns unknown even to the Arabs. And later an underground magazine for corn was found sufficiently large to contain a year's supply for the whole population of the city.

Wherever excavations are made in Constantine Roman work of one kind or another is always discovered. In one of the mosques of the city there are forty columns, no two of them alike, all built out of fragments of the old Roman town.

The path from the city to the bed of the Ouled Rummel runs from the hill below the esplanade on which a Kabyle market is sometimes held, down a ravine at places lined with fig trees, almond trees, olives, and pomegranates, but oftener where the sides are steep, bare of vegetation.

The soil hereabouts seems extremely fertile. The bushes are full of birds. The place is a delight.

The Ouled Rummel at certain seasons of the year is almost dry. At other times it attains mighty dimensions and runs through the gorge at terrific speed. The falls then are a boiling cataract.

It was at the rock by these falls that a Turkish Bey of Constantine used to resort to the cruel practice of putting any wives he did not want into sacks and placing them on a plank, from which they were jerked over the abyss, to fall mangled on the rocks in the

Constantine : under the natural bridge.

(*Note railed pathway on the left-hand side of picture.*)

Facing page 112.

river-bed hundreds of feet below. The rock from which these poor creatures were thrown is still pointed out to the visitor.

I shuddered when I saw it, as I always shudder at the sight of that old tree still standing in Central Africa where only a few years back a native king had two hundred and fifty of his wives executed.

The storks were in evidence at Constantine in the city as well as in the old Arab quarter, where I counted fifteen nests on the housetops in a hundred square yards.

Roads and tunnels have been dug out of the solid rock by the French, with railed positions for the convenience of sight-seers. The depth of the precipices made me giddy. I watched from this dizzy height peregrines and kestrels with the light striking on their plumage soaring far below me in the ravine, where they were resting in caves embedded in this marvellous bit of rugged nature. Pigeons were darting in and out down the ravine, scared by the French sportsmen, far below me, who were firing guns in a vain endeavour to bring one of them down. It would have puzzled these sportsmen to have retrieved their pigeon if they had been lucky enough to shoot one. Perhaps what they wanted more particularly was to hear the report of their guns and the reverberating echo and to see the frightened birds dart out in every direction. The surprising thing about the whole business was the indifference of the hawks to the sound of the firing. I think they knew they were safe, so far as these French gunmen were concerned at any rate.

The suspension bridge at the top of the gorge, five hundred and fifty feet above the river-bed, is one hundred and seventy yards long.

The French, when they took the place on October 13th, 1837, stormed it by the isthmus on the western side. General Dammont, the commander of the expedition, had been shot down the day before whilst visiting the foremost trenches, and General Valée conducted operations. The inhabitants of the town were in a great panic when the storming troops showed up, and tried to escape. There was only one gate by which they could do so. That opened on to a bridge no longer standing, which crossed the southern side of the river, and rested on a natural bridge of native rock, of which, as mentioned above, several exist at Constantine. But this bridge was narrow, and the heights on the other side were occupied by the French. The despairing townspeople resorted to the wild plan of lowering themselves down to the bottom of the ravine, using ropes. Thousands of them perished. When the French at last entered the town by the very bridge over which the fugitives had intended to escape they found to their horror heaps of mangled corpses in the ravine below, corpses of men, women and children.

Those of the townspeople who did fight put up a desperate resistance. Colonel Lamorciéres, who was at the head of the storming party, was severely wounded through the explosion of a powder magazine.

Until the year before the French took Constantine

A huge cavern under Constantine.

(*Note pathway and bridge of iron.*)

Facing page 114.

he portion of the city against which they directed heir assault had been occupied by a Turkish Government building constructed of scraps of material rom the Roman remains.

On their first unsuccessful attempt at taking the ity the French assault took place at that point. Hadji Ahmat, the Bey of Constantine, realised then hat this was the city's most vulnerable point, and ad the building destroyed to give more room for lefence work.

During the siege of Constantine by the French, nd immediately after their occupation, no less than our thousand houses were destroyed by them. On he site thus freed they constructed barracks.

The Arab quarter of Constantine dates from the ime of the Romans. The streets here are often even arrower than those in the Arab quarter of Algiers. Like them they are lined with small shops.

The trade that Constantine does with the surrounding country is extremely varied. Consequently it auses one no surprise to note in these shops ommodities which one would not expect to find in he Arab quarter of any town.

The Kabyles, mentioned above, are the most nteresting people in the Constantine district. The French have succeeded in subduing them, more by he use of guile than of force. But the endeavours of the Romans in a similar direction were always unsuccessful.

The Kabyle settlements about the town are well

worth a visit. Even when dwelling in a town the Kabyle must have his garden. You stumble across a market partly surrounded by Kabyle huts, most of which have a small piece of garden, a garden perhaps about the size of a billiard table, but from which by dint of assiduous cultivation the Kabyle owner is successful in raising quite satisfactory vegetables for his own consumption.

In the market bricks, dates, wood, wool and other products of the country are exposed for sale. One of these products is a red salt which is obtained from the rocks at Milah some nine miles away. And about you, all of them busy, are picturesque groups of the Kabyles themselves.

What a different race they are from the Arabs may be seen by visiting one of the Arab markets in the town. There the sellers sit among their goods dreamily, as if the existence of the world were forgotten by them, or lie about in the sunlight gambling and gossiping.

In their long burnouses they look like a lot of white birds.

Mendicants of various descriptions are everywhere in the town—blind singers, dervishes, negroes, people whose deformities earn them an easy living.

There are plenty of Jews in Constantine as well as in the rest of Algeria, and they, with their baggy trousers and altogether queer attire generally, are very noticeable. I saw some quite fair Jewesses here, handsome women with fair complexions and auburn hair. But the majority are dark like the Arabs.

The stork.

I. Contemplative. *II. Preening.* *III. Stretching.*

Facing page 116.

Arabs and Jews in Constantine each have their own quarter assigned to them. They live harmoniously together here, as indeed they do all over Algeria. Neither may eat pork, and both are keenly interested in trading, so they have something in common.

The old custom of the races keeping separate still exists, of course. An Arab will not go to a Jewish café if he can help it, and *vice versa*. This is not only prejudice. Jewish cafés are conducted differently from Arab ones, and the Jew feels more at home in one run by a fellow Jew. There is not nearly so much hatred of the Jews here in Algeria as there is in Morocco or even in the city of Algiers, where before the French came the Jews were often treated with great cruelty.

Constantine is a very important Mohammedan centre. There is a theological college attached to the Mosque of Suleh Bey, to which flock students from all parts of North Africa.

I have mentioned the wonderful natural arches that connect the limestone rock on which the town is built with the other side of the Ouled Rummel Gorge. These are quite one of the most interesting natural features of the place.

The largest is somewhere near a hundred yards wide, and there are two others almost as magnificent. Under their curved tops in holes in the rocks jackdaws and other birds have built their nests. There is no fear of any small boy coming along and robbing these nests, for they are quite inaccessible.

II

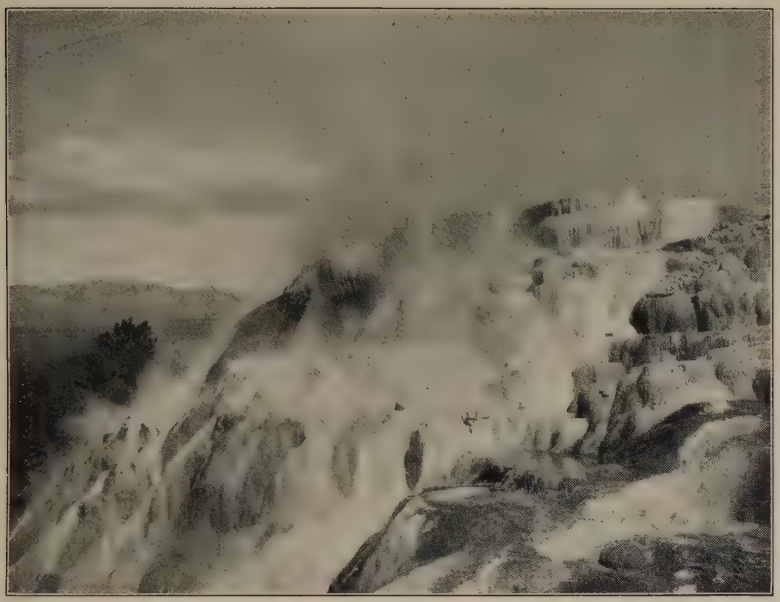
I went on from Constantine to see the famous Hot Springs that lie some few miles to the east.

Hammam-Meskoutine, as the principal spring is called, is situated forty miles from the sea. The water supplying the baths runs in great force from the top of a rock which is formed entirely of deposits from the springs. It attains a temperature of 203°, and forms a beautiful cascade, as will be seen from the illustration, a cascade smaller than, but reminding me of, the hot springs in Yellowstone Park. Bore anywhere near this cascade and boiling sulphurous water will issue from the earth.

The whole neighbourhood is full of springs and cones made of carbonate of lime, deposited by hot jets which spurt from the ground and continue to spurt until they are gradually choked by their own deposit. It is a good large group of these cones that has given rise to the name Hammam-Meskoutine (The Baths of the Damned), "the Damned" being in this instance Marabout Abdullah, a rich sheik, and his sister, who after committing a monstrous crime were turned to stone by the Almighty.

The Romans made Hammam-Meskoutine one of their spas. The baths they constructed are still to be seen, large affairs cut in the tufa, the Arab name for the ancient deposit made by the springs.

About the baths are the remains of numerous Roman villas. Happy are the people who live in this



The hot springs of Hammam-Meskoutine.

Facing page 118.

locality. The valley of Hammam-Meskoutine is one of the loveliest spots in Africa. Here flowers bloom eternally, nightingales sing, the vegetation is luxuriant, and the climate everything to be desired. The richness of the whole neighbourhood impressed me greatly. Especially does agriculture flourish on the seaward side. Vineyards are plentiful. There are thousands of acres under corn. And I saw herds of cattle, stockily built, hardy beasts, most of them of a sort of fawn brown colour.

The local people supply a curious explanation of the origin of these springs. It is as follows :—

" King Solomon built baths all over the world, and confided them to the keeping of persons who were blind, deaf, and dumb, so that they should not see, hear, or repeat what happened among the bathers. Now it was obviously impossible to let these persons know that Solomon died centuries ago, so they go on stoking the fires as ordered by him, and this explains how it is that the water is always boiling at Hammam-Meskoutine."

Another story is an explanation of the two cones which are supposed to be the petrified remains of the Marabout and his ungodly sister. They are inclined towards each other, and are known as the " Arab Marriage." Marabout Abdullah's identity is established by the turban on his head.

Near the springs is an underground lake in two basins forming a figure eight. The narrow part of the

lake is 85 feet in width, the left basin from 120 to 190 feet, and the right basin from 160 to 190 feet, with an average depth of 50 feet. The lake is the floor of an immense cavern. The visitor can explore it in a boat with the aid of artificial light. Suspended from the roof are magnificent stalactites stained yellow by iron oxide.

The district of Hammam-Meskoutine used to abound in lions, and many are the tales old Frenchmen there tell of their fathers' adventures with these animals.

It was a common belief apparently among them that a lion will never attack a man unless he is provoked. Some French farmers were returning home from a jollification in a cart drawn by a couple of horses one day. About two miles from home one said to the other :

"There is a lion!"

"No," said the other, "it's a big dog. But I believe you're right, it is a young lion!"

"I know that lion," rejoined the first. "It is about here often. What awful manners the brute has, staring at us like that. If it doesn't behave better I've a good mind to shoot it."

And on the two drove to continue their jollification.

On another occasion two French soldiers were walking out to a village near Constantine. They did not start together, although they should have done so. The one who went first had had a little too much to drink and muddled the time of the appointment.

After going some distance he lost his sword, and

while looking for it fell down on the grass and went to sleep.

The second traveller, who was sober, found the sword and hurried after his lost friend. He found him in the grass.

"Pig!" he shouted. "Get up!"

To his abject horror and amazement, there got up at once, not the man, but a large lion which had been sleeping at the drunken poilu's side, and which his friend had mistaken for the trunk of a tree.

The Aurésian forests used to be full of wild boar, and hunting them was a favourite sport with the Arabs. About a hundred would gather for the hunt, some on horseback, some on foot, all armed with long guns and heavy boar spears.

The best parts of the country for hunting were the undulating groves and the plains powdered with low bushes adjacent to the forest.

Beaters were thrown out. Their cry, "Hallouf! Hallouf!" announced a boar had been located.

The whole party would go after it full speed, their boar hounds, animals resembling Scotch deer hounds but with curled tails, baying loudly.

Soon the boar would be perceived. Yelling, the Arabs would gallop after it, their white burnouses streaming in the breeze, their bare arms brandishing gun and spear.

If the beast gained the open, all the party let fly at it, regardless of what happened to be in the way—shooting with a party of excited Arabs is a dangerous

sport. If the boar took to cover the party would surround it and dispatch it with spears, which Arabs can hurl accurately and pick up again from the ground when going at full gallop.

III

I retraced my steps westward and then went south. Travelling by motor-car, I made my way towards Batna and Timgad. The road ascends to a bare limestone plateau, very monotonous in aspect, bare of trees, and covered with herbage at certain seasons of the year. Wild artichokes and wormwood grow here in quantities, as does at certain seasons of the year a grass very nourishing to cattle. The sand in this part of Algeria is impregnated with salt.

A very different vegetation here from that of the Tell and the district round Algiers. Grasses predominate. Trees are scarce. There grows also a kind of wild thyme of which camels are very fond.

Soon we came to the famous Salt Lakes. These lakes are common all along the middle plateau of the Atlas. The first I saw was nothing more than a large marsh in the middle of the very flat plain. It was covered with very fine grass. Soon we came to two others, the water of which was strongly impregnated with salt.

Dreary places these salt lakes, covered with white vapour in the early morning. They make one feel

cold to look at them. The heart is touched by their solitude.

I noticed on them the usual groups of flamingos, but although I tried very hard I did not succeed in obtaining a photograph. In Central Africa I have seen flamingos in such numbers as to make the water appear pink.

The plains and the mountains of the lake country are dreary. Trees reappeared on the landscape when we were within a few miles of Batna. This is the military position established by the French in the early days of their occupation to secure the road from Constantine to Biskra. It lies on the highest point of the plateau at an elevation of over 3,000 feet. And from here to Biskra, which is thirty-seven feet below sea-level, the road gradually descends.

Lambessa, a village a little farther on, is the site of an important Roman camp, the headquarters of the third Augustan legion. This camp was formed probably about 2 A.D. There could not be a better site for a camp than Lambessa, as water is plentiful, and the Aurés Mountains afford shelter from the sirocco. It was probably with a view to subduing the hardy dwellers in these same mountains that the Romans established themselves here. The French have a prison here now ! The mountaineers have been subdued at last !

Important remains of the Romans are to be seen, the ruins of a temple dedicated to Æsculapius, a theatre, and a family tomb. Outside the walls there is an amphitheatre. Perhaps the most interesting ruin of all

is the one to which the French have given the name of Pretorium, which appears to have been the residence of a Roman commander.

I stopped at Batna for an hour, and then went on to Timgad via Lambessa.

On my arrival at Timgad I found a welcome at a small hotel close to the ruins.

This Timgad is, of course, the ancient Thamugas of the Romans, and they chose the site for it well, as they did for most of their cities. It stands on a spur of the Aurés Mountains, sheltered from the cold southerly winds. The Capitol and public offices are on a higher level than the residences of the inhabitants. Some of the columns of the façade of the Capitol are as much as fifty feet high, and several baths, the mosaic paving of which is in first-class preservation, have been unearthed.

From inscriptions found on the ruins the history of Timgad has been learnt with certainty. The Emperor Trajan gave orders for the city to be built. There were kings in those days! If a European monarch of the present era wants to build a shed in his back garden he has to ask the permission of the local sanitary inspector. Trajan also gave orders that the city was to be named Thamugas, after his sister.

For a period of five hundred years after its foundation Thamugas enjoyed peace and prosperity. Then the Romans' power declined and the Vandals attempted an invasion. Probably this attempt succeeded, for the Byzantines found the city in a ruined condition.

Remains of Timgad.

(*Note the brickwork.*)

Facing page 124.

It is generally believed that the Kabyles from the Aurés Mountains took the opportunity of the Vandal invasion of Algeria to destroy Timgad. These mountaineers have always been a thorn in the side of the rulers of Algeria.

We saw the famous Aurés Mountains closer on our journey south later on. The northern slopes are well wooded with pine, cedar, and other trees. The highest peaks of the Aurés range are Mahmal, Chelia and Ishmalel. These are covered with snow in winter time, Chelia being about 7,000 feet high.

Until the French came the Kabyles, as has been said, were never conquered. The Aurés Mountains are pretty nearly impregnable. They might be invaded from the plateau near Batna, and doubtless the Romans tried at this point, but the rocky southern spurs as well as the forbidding cliffs east and west of the range are natural fortresses.

Various Roman inscriptions near the foot of the range on all sides are evidence that the Romans did attempt to invade it. But it is significant that up to the present nothing has been found in the mountains themselves to point to a Roman occupation, although the gorge of Tighænmime bears an inscription stating that a Roman legion passed through it. And it will be noted that Lambessa and Timgad, two Roman towns to the north of the range, were very strongly fortified, probably to guard the Roman granaries against the incursions of these fierce hillmen.

Later, as will be seen, the Arab conqueror, Sidi

Okba, who subdued most of North Africa, was slain by Kabyles under Kahera, an Amazonian chieftainess. The Kabyles were still unconquered.

I spent a couple of days at Timgad, and roamed over the remains of what was once a fine Roman town. Before I arrived snow had been falling. Now it had cleared away, leaving the atmosphere bitterly cold. I didn't care, for I had been fortunate as regards my little hotel. There was plenty of warmth there, good food, and even a hot-water bottle for my bed. The owner had a chat with me in the evening. He could talk quite interestingly. This made the stay all the more pleasant for me and I hope and believe for him, for just before I left he ran after me and gave me a Roman coin to take away as a memento.

Every morning during my stay at Timgad I was out early wandering through what appeared to me at first to be a vast cemetery. And it was a cemetery, the cemetery of a mighty civilisation long since departed. Monuments of this sort to the Romans, who have left a record behind them in North Africa to be marvelled at, are common in this part of the country.

As I sat in one of the seats in what was once a magnificent theatre, I pictured in my mind a certain London suburb in distant England. I saw our bricklayers laying three hundred bricks a day. I saw the ill-built pill-boxes that the jerry-builder in charge was building to sell to helpless middle-class people for a thousand pounds or so. And I wished devoutly I had some of these sturdy, independent, hard-working,

A theatre that seated over 2,000, *Timgad.*

Facing page 126.

honest building folk with me in Timgad, in order that I might show them a little real building.

Timgad was built about 1,700 years ago by the Romans. As an example of town planning it is the equal of anything I have seen. Roads, temples, law courts, theatres, villas of the rich, houses of the poor, sanitation, everything down to the very street gutters, perfectly and beautifully arranged for the health and convenience of the citizens.

I reproduce a photograph of the theatre. This building held over two thousand people. I went over to a place where the authorities were excavating, and found they were still bringing to light more remains. A museum stands just inside the entrance to the town. Here is a collection of remarkable jewellery. There are fine vases in this museum, and many beautiful fragments of Roman handiwork.

I was interested in the restored mosaic work which is to be seen both in the museum and on the buildings outside. The designs illustrated were on a building freely exposed to the weather. Their colours are just as fresh as when they were made. This speaks well for the excellence of the materials used and the purity of the Algerian air.

The picture of a Venus here reproduced was photographed inside a building. As will be seen, part of the frame design is missing.

The visitor to Timgad who has seen Pompeii is bound to compare the two cities. Of the two I like Timgad better. The buildings to my mind are grander

than those of Pompeii, and the city more spaciously and conveniently planned.

The cost of unearthing such places as these must be enormous. I must express my gratitude to the French people for giving me the chance of viewing a city so uniquely beautiful and interesting as Timgad.

The district around this town was once a great grain producing country, large enough it is estimated to have supported the entire Roman army. The French are now beginning to bring it back to its former state of cultivation.

On the right of one of the illustrations reproduced will be seen the framework in stone which held the carved wooden door of the oldest mosque in Algeria. This mosque, named Sidi Okba, is situated well over one hundred miles away from Timgad. On my first visit to it I was told by the Arab in charge at the mosque that the door was originally covered with gold. I shall mention this door later, when on the subject of the mosque.

To sum up, Timgad probably possessed when most flourishing a population of 30,000,and contained public buildings and other conveniences which would have put to shame those of the average modern city of the same size. Beside the buildings enumerated above, there were hot and cold swimming baths and a free library, also a forum of enormous size, the area of which may be gauged from an inspection of the space occupied by the remnant of its gigantic pillars, which are still standing.

Timgad.

Mosaic work and stone doorway. Facing page 128.

I do not pretend to a knowledge of archæology, but the sight of this city, so well planned and delicately built, with its noble columns and arches, its pavement worn into ruts by chariot wheels, gave me an idea of the greatness of the genius which the people who constructed it must have possessed.

I wonder what they would have developed into had they known what we know about electricity and other sciences?

The road again! A few miles from Timgad I noticed several storks, and as the car approached a farm-house adorned with a few trees which were struggling to keep up the semblance of an avenue I saw on the right hand of the road, quite high up among some pine trees, a speck of white. Soon I discovered that this speck was a stork sitting on her nest. I stopped the car and got out, being eager to get a moving picture of her sitting, leaving the nest, and alighting.

When I began to fix up my camera, off my stork flew. So I made a rough hide-up, and waited for her to come back. I had to wait some fifteen minutes before she came. Then I did not see her until she was actually on the nest, so silently did she come. My hastily improvised hide-up was not quite perfect. I called to my car companions to show themselves and scare the lady off the nest again while I put the defects right. We scared her off twice. On both occasions she waited for another car to pass before

coming back, under the impression, I suppose, that I was in that car and all was well.

This female stork whilst sitting on the nest always gave warning of the approach of her husband by standing up, putting her head back with her beak pointing skywards, and making a peculiar click-clacking sound. I suppose she wanted to know why he was so late, and he would have to tell the usual tale about having been so busy at the office !

I found, quite to my surprise, two more storks' nests in these trees. I had always seen these nests on the houses before. When there are houses about storks seldom build in trees.

" According to some writers," so the Rev. J. G. Wood says, the name " stork " was given to this bird because it was supposed to be a bird remarkable for its filial piety. " For the storks in their turn support their parents in their old age : they allow them to rest their necks on their bodies during migration, and, if the elders are tired, the young ones take them on their backs." According to others, the name is given to the stork because it exercises kindness towards its companions in bringing them food ; but in all cases the derivation of the word is acknowledged to be the same.

" Partly in consequence of this idea, which is a very old and almost universal one, and partly on account of the great services rendered by the bird in clearing the ground of snakes, insects, and garbage, the stork has always been protected through the East, as it is to

Venus crowning the centaur.

Facing page 130.

the present day in several parts of Europe. The slaughter of a stork, or even the destruction of its eggs, would be punished with a heavy fine ; and in consequence of the immunity which it enjoys, it loves to haunt the habitations of mankind.

" When they settle upon a tract of ground, the storks divide it among themselves in a manner that seems to have a sort of system in it, spreading themselves over it with wonderful regularity, each bird appearing to take possession of a definite amount of ground. By this mode of proceeding the ground is rapidly cleared of all vermin, the storks examining their allotted space with the keenest scrutiny, and devouring every reptile, mouse, worm, grub or insect that they can find on it. Sometimes they will spread themselves in this manner over a vast extent of country, arriving suddenly, remaining for several months, and departing without giving any sign of their intention to move.

" Like the swallow, the stork resorts year after year to the same spots, and when it has once fixed a locality for its nest, that place will be assuredly taken as regularly as the breeding season comes round. The same pair are sure to return to their well-known home, notwithstanding the vast distances over which they pass and the many lands in which they sojourn. Should one of the pair die the other finds a mate in a very short time, and thus the same home is kept up by successive generations of storks, much as among men one ancestral mansion is inhabited by a series of members of the same family.

"So well is this known that when a pair of storks have made their nest in a human habitation their return is always expected, and when they arrive the absentees are welcomed on all sides. In many countries breeding-places are specially provided for the storks; and when one of them is occupied for the first time the owner of the house looks upon it as a fortunate omen.

"In many cases the stork breeds among old ruins, and under such circumstances it is fond of building its nest on the tops of pillars or towers, the summit of arches, and similar localities. When it takes up its abode among mankind it generally selects the breeding-places which have been built for it by those who know its taste, but it frequently chooses the top of a chimney or some such locality.

"Sometimes, however, it is obliged to build in spots where it can find neither rocks nor buildings, and in such cases it builds in trees, and, like the heron, is sociable in its nesting, a whole community residing in a clump of trees. It is not very particular about the kind of tree, provided that it be tolerably tall and strong enough to bear the weight of its enormous nest, and the reader will at once see that fir trees are peculiarly fitted to be the houses for the stork."

The Rev. H. B. Tristram mentions from personal experience an instance of the watchful care exercised by the stork over its young. "The writer was once in camp near an old ruined tower in the plains of Zana, south of the Atlas, where a pair of storks had their

nest. The four young might often be seen from a little distance surveying the prospect from their lonely height, but whenever any of the human party happened to stroll near the tower one of the old storks, invisible before, would instantly appear, and lighting on the nest put its feet gently on the necks of all the young, so as to hold them down out of sight till the stranger had passed, snapping its bill meanwhile, and assuming a grotesque air of indifference, and unconsciousness of there being anything under its charge." (Smith's *Dict. Bible*, vol. iii., p. 1,384.) The snapping noise which is here mentioned is the only vocal sound produced by the stork, which is a remarkably silent bird as far as its voice is concerned.

Chapter V

THE WAY TO THE DESERT

I

AFTER Batna the ground slipped rapidly under our feet as we headed for the Desert. A good deal of the country hereabouts made me think of France. There were farmsteads, rows of poplar trees; and the next moment the car would run by deplorable improvised tents made from any old sort of rag, with a camel or two beside them, and their Bedouin Arab owners with their families making up the picture.

These nomad Arabs one runs across in most parts of Algeria. There are rich and there are poor among them, but they all prefer to wander at certain times of the year, in the Desert in the winter, on the northern plateaux in summer, seeking pasturage for their flocks. In the autumn they gather about the date oases, where they help to pick the harvest.

These Bedouin Arabs claim descent from Ishmael, and in Arabia, their original home, are perhaps the purest of the Arab race. But the African Bedouin is a very different person from the Asian, a dirtier person, in whose veins runs the blood of slaves, and whose character is modified accordingly.

He is a considerable liar and an incorrigible thief.

He wouldn't admit either of these allegations against his character, but if you called him a robber he would probably smile at the flattery.

The tent of the poorer Bedouin is, like the one I described just now, made up of any old scraps of stuff, that of the richer man of better material, often dyed black, or of black camel skin. In both cases it is of a portable character, and can be taken down in a few moments and loaded on camels. The women and children are assigned a special quarter within the tent or are given a slip tent adjoining.

These women are *not* kept carefully veiled like the rest of their Arab sisters. I for my part often wish they were, for the Bedouin woman is usually remarkably ugly. She, like the other Arab women, is very fond of jewellery and trinkets, and she suffers her passion for bright colours to carry her to extremes whenever her purse permits of it. Bedouin women never wear a veil. They are content to keep a hand on their head covering when strange men threaten to ravish them with their eyes, and when the time comes to — let themselves be ravished.

Altogether the Bedouin lady has a much freer time than is usual with ladies hereabouts, and neither she nor her sun-stained husband are remarkable for the constancy of their affection nor for chastity. Promiscuity is a better word to use when talking of the Bedouin sex relations. Nevertheless, the Bedouin husband, like most Arab husbands, well-behaved or otherwise, is given to fits of jealousy, and in moments

of great strain is too apt altogether to use a knife or a gun.

The children are merry little creatures. They run stark-naked save for an amulet or two until the age of seven.

Amulets and charms are among the most precious possessions of the Bedouins, who are very superstitious, believe in cabalistic writing, tell fortunes by the sand and foretell accidents by the movements of animals and insects and the trifling happenings of the day.

For food the Bedouins have the kous-kous, dates and beans, and flat cakes made of butter and wheat and baked on a red-hot plate.

Their flocks are nothing like so big as they used to be in former days. They lead them, do not drive them, to the grazing grounds, now, alas! owing to the settlement of Northern Algeria, fewer in number than ever, and when the grazing is over lead them on again.

The next day all that is left of their encampment is a litter of garbage and a few fire-blackened stones!

Daily when traversing the Desert fringes one comes across these Bedouins. Especially do they haunt that region close to the northern mountains where the ribbon of dwarf scrub forms a division between the vegetation proper and the sand.

How they obtain pasture there for their scanty flocks is a mystery! And what pasture it is when obtained! The dried-up bushes can scarcely keep a hold on life.

Bedouins on the march.

Facing page 136.

They have no water to make them succulent and there is barely any nourishment in the soil. Their stalks are shrivelled. There is a deposit of salt on their leaves.

You see as you pass, in a sun-heat that is like the breath of a mighty oven, goats and sheep cropping at these terrible pastures, watched by ragged youths and naked boys. You see the black, camel-hair tents of the Bedouin, inky blots on the golden sand, you see the tethered donkeys and the camels and the barking dogs.

In these winter months this part of Algeria is their habitation. Before the summer rains come in the north and the bleak steppes there become green they will wend their way slowly there with these scanty flocks of theirs.

I have met them on their travels not once but often. First comes the chief, or leader of the squad. Then follow camels and asses, laden with firewood, sacks of dates and food, cooking utensils, goat skins full of water, tents, jutting tent poles. Next possibly a camel or two, each with a large curtained tent erected on its hump, a tent which if you draw too close to the Bedouins in attendance will treat you with a scowl. These tents contain Bedouin beauties. If you are lucky, at the crucial moment a curtain will flutter aside, and you will be treated to a glimpse of the fair contents.

A lover of the beautiful myself, when such a contretemps occurs I always close my eyes. The Bedouin's idea of what is pretty and desirable in woman is, as I have hinted above, not my own.

Most of the Bedouin beauties I have seen—and I may say here that Arab women in general and Bedouin women in particular seem to expose their faces to the public gaze much more frequently than they used to during my first visit twenty years ago—have been flattish-faced, swarthy creatures, with well-pomatumed locks, kohl-darkened eyes, henna-dyed hands, who dressed badly and wore always all the jewellery they could lay their hands on.

These tents on the camels sometimes hold, beside the Bedouin beauties, the smaller of their children.

When the women of the tribe get old—and ugly, I was going to say, but they always were that—they have to get out and walk behind the camels. With them, led by them often, is usually an ass or two, heavily loaded. Flocks of sheep and goats with the men leading them, a horse or two, more cattle and a few mounted Bedouins make up the party.

Thus travel the nomads as they travelled in Palestine in Biblical times. The Arab alters but slowly.

But these Bedouin peoples are altering, nevertheless, and altering more quickly now that the French are exercising such a civilising influence on the Sahara. I noticed myself on this my second visit how much seldomer one passed a Bedouin camp, and how much smaller was the camp and how much scantier were the flocks and herds.

The Bedouin is settling down. Water in his case has been the influence. The French have sunk artesian wells all over the Desert, and where these

are there vegetation flourishes, and there can the Arab, be he nomad or otherwise, live his life in comfort. But the Bedouin will never die out so long as the gipsy instinct lingers in the breast of mankind. If I lived in Africa I think I should like to be a nomad for at least some months of every year. In the Desert a house becomes superfluous, possessions, date palms, wives, families, so many shackles between one and freedom. There is no life, given good weather, comparable to that of a gipsy, and there is no place comparable with the Great Sahara for leading a gipsy life in.

I envy these nomad Arabs, while disliking them rather. They always remind me of our own gipsies, untidy like the gipsies, and like them rather dirty. In fact, to my mind dirt and untidiness are the most noticeable characteristics of these nomad Arabs, especially of those I have met north of Biskra. How they can reconcile their filthy habits with Islam, a religion which puts cleanliness even before godliness, I for one can never understand.

Water there is in the oases, and garments are duly washed in it. But so far the sight of a nomad Arab bathing his person has not been vouchsafed me.

Most of the illnesses they suffer from are due to dirt. The dirt of generations clings to the inside of their huts and tents.

In other parts of the world I have frequently seen the tourist engaged in the purchase of curios. He never minds, bless him, how dirty a gong, a spear, a pair of horns, a weird musical instrument may be. He handles

it lovingly, pays half the price asked for it, and departs hugging his bargain. And for aught he knows there may have been in the seller's hut small pox, cholera, not to mention a dozen skin diseases, any one of which will kill if he catches it, or rather it catches him.

Of course, about Biskra there is a great sale for Arab carpets. The dirtier-looking and older-looking the carpet the more the buyer is willing to pay for it. There is not the slightest difficulty in getting dirty carpets in Algeria. I myself have seen an Arab with eight carpets on the floor of his tent getting them dirty for customers. But if you will insist on purchasing such a carpet, don't put baby down to play on it after you get it home to England!

Most Bedouin and other Arabs can weave carpets. Indeed, the wealthy Arab, instead of going to a shop and buying a carpet, hires a couple of Bedouin carpet-makers, installs them in his house and has his carpet made to his own taste.

He provides them with the wool and the dyes necessary—most of these latter are made in the country—and after a sheep has been sacrificed to bring luck to the work the carpet weaving begins.

It is woven on a very simple loom indeed. One carpet-maker sits on one side of the vertical frame, the other faces him. They work at a very leisurely pace, using small skewers to manipulate the threads. Much care is required to get the pattern right, and the whole process is necessarily very laborious. In fact, the employer may die before he gets his carpet. Kismet!

Of course, if the carpet is finished before the prospective owner dies everyone is better pleased, and the carpet-makers may demand the sacrifice of another sheep to propitiate the djinns, of which there seem to be quite a number in Algeria, and incidentally to obtain for themselves another good meal of roast mutton, which, unlike the djinns, is none too plentiful among the poorer Arabs.

Queer, is it not, that these members of a fairly enlightened religious faith should go in for sacrifices? But where one finds Mohammedanism one always finds superstition. Indeed, one of the reasons the Mohammedan religion is spreading so fast—another is that the true believer can obtain all the wives he wants without fear of sinning—is the fact that its proselytes allow converts to retain their own devil-worship in various forms, so long as they pay lip service to Islam.

Au fond the Algerian, and this includes the Bedouin, believes in the existence of evil spirits almost as firmly as he does in that of Allah. There are charms to ward off ills of every kind, and the "holy man" or marabout who can supply them is absolutely certain of a good living.

One charm is the amulet. This is merely a piece of paper scrawled with cabalistic characters which, placed in a little silver slot or box, is tied with a ribbon against the person.

These travelling marabouts, wretched creatures, also tell the future, consulting mysterious books, or by means of cards, spinning tops, and sand. And they

also—important task—provide love philtres to enable a wife to retain the affection of her somewhat fickle husband, or a woman to obtain revenge on a man who refuses to make love to her,

They will take a sheep's liver and hang it up in their intended victim's house, believing that with its shrivelling so will shrivel the person of the hated one. One never notices odd smells in an Arab house, otherwise such a plan could not succeed.

An Algerian in failing health does not believe that he is ill, but rather that he is the victim of enchantment. So he goes along to the marabout, instead of a doctor, and—buys an amulet.

The business done in love philtres for fickle husbands in Algeria is immense. Few are the wives that do not want to use one some time or other. Divorce is easy. Directly a woman ceases to be pretty, or if she neglects to bear him sons, the Arab husband has no further use for her. He sends her back to her people, sells her, turns her adrift to go on the streets. He doesn't care what becomes of her. She has served his need. She can go where she will. Again, Kismet !

These cheap marabouts, dervishes, dealers in charms, and quacks in general were not encouraged by the Prophet. Several instances exist in the Holy Book of his having reprimanded followers who were inclined to mysticism and the priestly craft. But so strong is the hold of superstition over unlettered mankind that, in spite of this teaching, superstitious practices are rampant all over the Mohammedan world.

A favourite charm among the Algerian Arabs is the magic square. This consists of nine figures written in the form of a square. Added in any direction the figures total fifteen.

Written charms enclosed in leather amulets and then sewn in the inside of fezes or of garments and hung round the neck are considered efficacious against ophthalmia, which as all Arabs know is caught by encountering the gaze of a toad. The writing of such a charm would run as follows: "In the Name of Allah, pity and love. Veil thine eyes for the sake of Lord Mohammed and his friends. No one can help but Allah alone!"

The charm for its efficacy depends to some extent on the colour of the ink used. Still more on the holiness of the person who has supplied it.

Children wear their charms openly. Some of them wear very little else. A string of pink coral beads is supposed to keep away scarlet fever. Pink coral is particularly efficacious too, as I have said elsewhere, against the evil eye.

In order to prevent the child's nose from bleeding a plaited cord of blood-red silk must be hung round its neck. The hair of a little baby four months and ten days old, if worn on the person, is an infallible preventive against scorpion and snake bites. Even camels wear such a charm.

Grown-up people do not permit the charms they are wearing to be seen. This is only being ordinarily cautious. An enemy, if he knew what charms the man

was wearing, might go along to the marabout and buy a counter-charm.

Of course, the bleached bones and camel skulls that one sees tied to date palms are seldom hidden.

And not all charms are worn, either. The woman whose love has been scorned has, as stated above, her method of getting even without wearing a charm. For warding off fever, too, no amulet is necessary. All that has to be done is to write certain cabalistic words on the shell of an egg, roast the egg on a red fire, and eat it, shell and all.

Later, El Kantara itself loomed into sight, and my pulse began to quicken, for I knew what was beyond those towering, forbidding-looking rocks, where Hercules is supposed by a twist of his foot to have opened a passage, making a gateway to the Desert.

At El Kantara again your mind is taken back to the Romans, whose legions passed here over bridges and roads cut through the rocks. As I filmed the scene a train, a motor-car and a camel passed through the gorge, whilst an aeroplane droned overhead. I thought that it only wanted the presence of these Roman legions to make my picture complete.

Some of the work of these grand old Romans remains here. It is so sound that I suppose fragments of it will remain for ever. I saw it and the romantic surroundings of the pass with as keen a pleasure as I experienced on my first visit. A little village built centuries ago by an old Morocco pilgrim, Ahmed Ben Sil Nacer, nestles

among date palms on the yellow hillside here. From the bank beside it you obtain a wonderful view of the surrounding district.

I visited a private house right on the edge of the rock overlooking the river. This place is occupied by a European, who has been there many years, and a more perfect and peaceful home could not be found this side of heaven. The owner's romance and the reason for his hermit life it is not, I feel, my business to unfold.

One hundred and fifty feet below me wandered the river through thousands of date palms. The beautiful almond trees were in bloom. On my left towered the wonderful rocks of El Kantara, rocks which appear to have survived some terrible ordeal of fire.

They belong, these rocks, to some world more terrible and beautiful than our own. You feel as you look at them that if they could tell what they have seen of marching legions, of bloody war, of love, of tumult, death, passion and decay, they would hold the world spell-bound.

They certainly had cast their spell on me, for from time to time on my way to Biskra I looked back, fascinated, at them, as they shone in the varying light.

The Arabs call El Kantara the Gate of the Desert, and certainly it is worthy of the name. It is a rift in a high wall of reddish rock, flanked by mountains, which separates two worlds—one might almost say without exaggeration the worlds of civilisation and of savagery. The rift, whose precipitous walls are some thousand feet high, ends in a stony valley.

The European settlement at El Kantara is small. There is an inn, a post office, the railway station—for the railway runs through the gorge—and a small school for French children. But these villages ensconced beside groves of date palms on the southern side of the gorge are well worth visiting, especially so as most Europeans don't bother with them, but hurry on to Biskra.

The first, known as the White Village, borders the Biskra road. Small shops there supply native customers with anything in reason from a pin to a camel. Go up one of the winding lanes between the mud-built houses of this White Village, lanes scarcely wide enough to let a fat man walk in comfort. You will notice in the windowless walls fragments of Roman masonry. You will see that, unlike Pharaoh's slaves, the builders of these huts did not make bricks without straw.

Presently you will find yourself in a garden full of date palms, peach and orange trees, cool with the airs that ascend from the adjacent stream.

When the trees are in bloom these gardens are very pretty. At any time of the year they form an excellent retreat from the glare of the sun and the monotony of the rocks, sand, and barren hills which form the usual features of the landscape hereabouts.

The Black Village farther down the Biskra road can next be visited. Afterwards go by the stepping-stones across the stream to where the Red Village stands perched upon the bank, and visit the native café there,

and the Roman bridge near by, from which El Kantara takes its name.

II

From El Kantara we ran through undulating, stony plains, plains dotted with the homesteads of French settlers, bearing upon them the marks of a feeble cultivation. We skirted the fringe of an oasis, topped a hill.

Biskra, with its palms, was lying at my feet!

Had twenty years slipped by since I last saw it It looked much the same. The Desert was beyond it like a sea, yellow, grey, immense, inhospitable. In the distance I could just discern Sidi Okba. And now a couple of miles away on my right I noticed a building which I had not seen before. It was a place where the hot springs are now harnessed for the benefit of those in search of health.

We descended the hill and came rapidly towards the town.

Biskra! no, this is not my Biskra! It has been altered, modernized out of knowledge—spoilt!

Biskra, the Queen of the Desert, is a shopping centre for all the tribes around. You will find in the streets and cafés Arabs of the Desert, mountaineers from the adjacent ranges, peasants from up country, and indeed a sprinkling of almost every race in North Africa. Biskra is like Brighton in this respect, that if you live there long enough you are sure to run up against all your old friends.

Later I wandered through the old negro and Arab quarters, places always of much interest. I made inquiries of the people there concerning men I had known. I found old friends. Much altered they were. Many I had known had passed away. I saw new roads, new sanitary buildings, new—— Oh, this wonderful French zeal for efficiency! It has left little to remind me of old times.

Losing myself in this maze of new roads, houses, trees, everything, I came out on the bank of the dried-up river-bed, to find I was opposite the old marabout. This still stands in the middle of the river defying all the storms and floods, government edicts, and sanitary inspectors.

A marabout I may explain here means a Mohammedan saint or holy man. But it also means the tomb where a saint is buried, and which therefore is considered to be endowed with a sacred character.

Neither burial-grounds nor the tombs of saints are formally consecrated. There is no form of consecration of such places used in the Mohammedan religion. But all Mohammedans highly reverence their dead, and show intense respect when in their presence.

Some of these marabouts are nothing more than ignorant, half-mad, wandering dervishes, whose very eccentricities make the Arabs regard them with awe. But the average Mohammedan marabout or holy man is a dignified, learned person of parts, and, if rich, of much benevolence. He spends his days in living a life of strict chastity, strict at least according

A famous marabout.

Facing page 148.

to Arab notions, in giving to the poor, helping them all he can, and doing his utmost for the good of the Mohammedan religion. He also is a person noted throughout his district for his knowledge of and ability to expound the Sacred Books, and for an ability to preach a good sermon. Crowds flock to hear him. At his death he becomes a saint, and if his sons show any disposition to follow in their father's footsteps saints they will become perhaps also, for the Arab has a strong belief in the influence of heredity.

These tombs of marabouts, which are dotted all over Mohammedan lands, have a twofold value. First, they bring pilgrims to the place, and thereby put money into the pockets of the local shopkeepers. Secondly, wealthy men will pay a good deal to be buried near the last resting-place of a famous marabout, and the land goes up in value.

The marabout's tomb is always in charge of a keeper, who is usually full of stories illustrating his patron's piety and holiness. Many of the tales are untrue, many of them are true. When Crusaders were willing to give up riches, wife, and everything that made life worth living, and go to Palestine to fight for the Cross, there were Mohammedans, such as the followers of Saladin, who did much the same for the sake of the Crescent. No religion has a monopoly of holy men.

Of course, there are degrees of holiness even among marabouts, and some were men of bigger character than others. Beside the tombs of the most celebrated of

them mosques (which, after them, are also called marabouts) have been built, and endowed with funds for their upkeep by rich and pious Arabs. On the other hand, many of the marabouts have no funds, and were it not for the alms of the pilgrims they would gradually fall to rack and ruin.

Many of these tombs are well worth seeing. There is little decoration often except that afforded by the carpet and the hanging lamps. Votive offerings are on exhibition, and sometimes one sees several cats walking about inside. The cat is an animal very much liked by the Mohammedans.

The profession of mad marabout must be a lucrative one in Biskra. I have run into several already on this my second visit. Their rosaries are much in evidence.

It is recorded that this marabout at Biskra is the sanctuary of a sacred man of Islam named Sidi Zerzou, who has been asleep for many centuries in the middle of this river. The Arabs believe this tale to be true. In the small interior of the building I counted sixteen lamps. They hang from the roof like so many bats in a church steeple. They are very much like the coloured hall gas-lamps you see in suburban houses. On certain occasions food is distributed from here to the poor of Biskra, and to pilgrims who cross the river-bed in great numbers, to my mind a practical way of showing and sowing religion.

I like this old marabout. So well built and solid-looking is it that it will, I think, defy the elements for many years to come.

A few yards farther up the bank I was surprised to find a small modern café has been built. Well, if they must build here, let them build cafés, said I to myself, and I called in to introduce my palate once again to real Arab coffee as brewed in the Desert. The Arab proprietor brought me the coffee. I tasted it. Visions of Lipton ! Why, even the Biskra coffee had changed !

I drank the coffee. The proprietor promptly invited me to have a gamble with him at dominoes for another cup. I felt quite friendly towards that proprietor. The Arab nature seems to me to be so far the only thing unchanged in Biskra.

These native cafés are the best places to make the acquaintance of the inhabitants of the town. You find people of all classes in them, from negroes fresh from a caravan journey across the Sahara to the nondescript character, half-Arab, half-who-knows, with the face of a diseased vulture, who is willing for a consideration to pilot you around the "night sights" of Biskra.

Just now I hadn't time to stay at this café as long as I should have liked. But I marked the place down for another visit, put it on my visiting list so to speak. The frequenters were squatted on the matted floor. Some were smoking cigarettes, some tubes full of juniper leaves, and one of the most sophisticated-looking a rank cheroot. All were sipping coffee. All were playing games of one sort or another, draughts, dominoes, card games. This seemed to me to be a café of the better sort. I had nobody come and accost me as a European frequently has in a low-class café. In

fact, I spoke to no one but the proprietor. I remember the time when in Biskra the appearance of a white man in a native café was the signal for some excitement. Another change. These Biskra people are getting used to us. They scarcely raised their heads to look at me.

Fairly important fellows in their way, these fellow-customers of mine, I thought, a shade piqued at their lack of attention. Probably a sprinkling of date merchants among them. These pay the grower a surprisingly small sum for his produce, considering the price they get for it themselves, and in business generally conduct themselves badly, paying no heed to the strict precepts of the Koran on the subject of usury. They can afford to frequent cafés.

One seldom sees a woman in these purely native cafés. Good Mohammedans don't allow their women out much. Unattached women, dancers and the like, find the semi-European places very much more profitable. And of course such have their own streets in Biskra, much patronised by the inhabitants. The Arab is not particularly virtuous. In fact, he considers that the proper study of mankind is "woman." He is a frugal soul, though, and his religion enjoins him daily to pray to be delivered from the sin of overspending. It is often difficult to get any money out of him. Especially is this so when the person attempting the feat is a woman. An Arab, that is one of the lower class, has no honour where women are concerned. Women are chattels, to be kept under lock and key

for fear of robbers. They are inferior things, rated very low.

I should say, however, that of late years the attitude of the better-class Arab towards women has undergone a considerable change. Many of them in the towns are content with one wife. I am talking of the richer Arabs. A poor Arab has never been able to afford more than one at a time. But more on this subject anon.

I won my second cup of coffee, and quite well pleased strolled back to the Hotel Sahara, along the banks of the dried-up river-bed. This river-bed at certain times of the year is filled with torrential rains, and has claimed the lives of quite a number of Arabs. I passed Count Landon's garden or park, and made up my mind to visit it on the morrow.

The rest of the day was occupied in making arrangements for my expedition into the wonderful Aurés Mountains, where I wanted to see some cliff-dwellers which a friend of mine who had been hunting there many years ago had told me about.

Landon Park, the gardens of the Château Landon, seems to have annexed the name "Garden of Allah" quite unjustifiably, for in Arabic "Garden of Allah" means the Great Desert itself. Don't blame Robert Hichens for this! He isn't responsible. I make this remark because I often hear people say that if he hadn't written *The Garden of Allah* Biskra would be quite a decent place.

I suppose by "decent place" they mean a place they can have to themselves. I can assure these very

exclusive people that there are plenty of quiet places left in Africa. I know a few myself, where a man can be absolutely quiet. One's nearest neighbours there are dumb things, such as malaria and sleeping sickness microbes.

I went along to the "Garden." Two francs are charged for admission. To one who has spent an hour or two in the Desert in the glaring sun I think it is worth the money. Within one finds coolness, shade, running water, the ever-refreshing foliage of trees and palms. Strolling slowly along I came upon the famous old Sand Diviner. He is still practising his art and still his old face glows as rapturously he points out to you the beauties of the place. He posed for me in the very setting where that famous book which made Biskra famous was either written or at any rate thought out, and on an adjoining page I give the resulting picture.

We wandered round this unique garden with its wonderful tropical vegetation. So deep is its quiet charm that it is difficult to tear oneself away. At your feet the cool waters glide silently past, winding in and out like some huge python among the trees. Strangely enough, for there is water and shelter to tempt them, I did not see any birds in these gardens. One sees, too, few flowers except some geraniums and convolvuli. A deep, brooding silence enwraps the place, a silence broken only by the ghost-like Arab gardeners tending beds and trees. And they tend these gardens as if they love them. Not even a wind-blown leaf is allowed to rest on the pathways.

The old sand diviner.

A Biskra sunset.

Facing page 154.

On one side of the gardens stood part of the old Arab town. This is now cleared away. From the opposite side you can sit on seats made of mud and look across the great Sahara, at once vast, mysterious, and alluring.

"Mysterious" and "alluring" are words I know that most writers are in the habit of using about the Sahara. But when one sees it stretching out golden under the afternoon sun, and thinks of what may be happening beyond that hazy horizon, one may be excused the repetition of these words.

That Desert you see before you there is the size of the whole of Europe, bar Scandinavia. Think of it! There is, it has been stated, enough sand in it to cover the whole of a similar area a foot deep, more or less, golden sand, fine-grained sand, that in many places moves like the sea and spumes like foam in a gust of the breeze, overwhelming men and caravans during a storm. At least in the Libyian portion of the Desert it is reported to have done so. One only gets to know these things at third hand.

After leaving this green garden I found one thing that had not changed. I was being pestered as of old by innumerable guides, beggars and small urchins. Farther along three snake-charmers were busy giving an exhibition before an hotel where a big crowd was gathered, and one of the performers, spotting me, walked across to the edge where I was standing and thrust a horned viper towards me, I suppose with the idea that I should show fear for the benefit of the

crowd. Although I knew the viper was rendered harmless, yet knowing his deadly character, I had difficulty in standing my ground. I am reminded of my early days when I used to go down big cliffs to photograph birds' nests. I always had a really good rope that I knew was quite secure, but when I saw the space beneath me my comparative safety I found difficult to believe in.

Farther along I was attracted by the change in the Town Gardens. The trees had grown almost out of recognition, and so had the town of Biskra itself. But what was left of the old native quarter had not changed. The narrow, crooked streets were as I remembered them. The atmosphere had the same indefinable charm. The people attracted me as much as ever.

There in the same streets even the cafés were as I used to know them, crowded as ever, their customers overflowing into the roadway, squatting in the brilliant sunshine, wrapped in robes of varying ages and colour, calmly playing draughts or dominoes, sipping coffee. The market was crowded as ever, too. The place is a centre for the whole of this part of the Sahara. Everything that an Arab of the Desert is likely to need can be purchased here. And many native industries are carried on in the immediate vicinity. Dates, oranges, figs, flour, beans, cloth, all these things are to be seen in profusion. In the arches at the side are situated windowless shops whose squatting keepers will sell you anything from a silver hair-pin to the entire wedding outfit of a wife of a sheik.

That evening I witnessed the sunset. It is at this time of day that Biskra ceases to be an ordinary Desert town, and becomes to the spectator a place of unspeakable beauty. I saw the Desert dreaming, pearl coloured, the hills beyond the farther bank of the river bathed in the lilac light. Each palm with its stiff crown and drooping leaves was cut out against the light in brown. The white burnouses of the Arab herdsmen were dyed a pale mauve, the dark-tinted flocks took on a deeper hue.

I looked towards the mountains at the back of me again. They had turned to gold. And now the Desert was changing colour also to match the changing glory of the sky. Tints of beauty indescribable were upon both of them, tints so evanescent that they faded away before I could drink in their beauty.

Down by the river was in darkness now, and darkness was already beginning to steal over the Desert. The tattered tents were blotted out. But still the distant mountains shone golden, beautiful, ethereal, as if belonging to another world.

Often at night in Biskra may be heard the mournful note of the little owl.

The Arabs say she used to call, "Where is my husband? Where is my husband?"

The story runs that it was her duty to pick insects from her husband's beautifully feathered head. One evil day her friends suggested she should kill him by driving her beak into his head, and then they would make her a queen of all the owls. She did this, but

when she wanted to become a queen they all said, "No, no, no. We only wanted to get rid of your husband!" The little bird then became very sorrowful, and that is why to-day you hear her call so plaintively, "Where is he? Where is he?"

Chapter VI

THE CLIFF DWELLERS

I

AT daybreak next morning my little expedition started. Our party comprised my guide, three other Arabs and myself. The Arabs rode on mules, I was mounted on a horse. We trekked eastwards over sand and broken ground, and jogged steadily along for the whole of an uneventful day. A fair amount of sand blew in our faces when we started. About midday this nuisance ceased. But lest we should rejoice overmuch, I suppose, the sun became very hot. Away to our right appeared a mirage, with Sidi Okba on the left of it.

In the late afternoon we reached a small oasis where we camped for the night. When darkness came a deep stillness pervaded the whole countryside. The heavens were of a green-blue tint. The stars looked very far away, and later the moon came up magnificently, illuminating the rocks, the plain, and savage hills with the brightness of day. Everything was outlined with a truly remarkable precision. Everything was very still. The shadows of the rocks and sparse vegetation stood out as if cut in black cloth.

Never do I obtain such moments of calm restfulness,

of beneficent feeling of being at utter peace both in body and in soul as when I am in the lonely, barren lands of North Africa, sitting pipe in mouth beside the embers of the camp fire, with my Arabs wrapped in their burnouses lying asleep around me.

My guide, as I had asked him to do, brought me a cup of coffee at 5 a.m. next morning. I am an early starter when on an expedition of this kind, always taking advantage of the cool of the day to put as much distance as I can between myself and my last camp.

We passed through a deserted mud village and, coming out on to the plain, again headed eastward. The foot of the mountain range we were making for was lying some miles away in front of me and on my left. The guide pointed out to me the hillock, very far ahead it was, where we were to turn off into the mountains.

Distances, as everyone knows, seem long in the Desert, especially so do they before breakfast. After travelling for three hours or more I pulled up at a dried water-course, and suggested to the cook that something to eat would not be amiss. Half-way through the meal I paused for conversation.

"A desolate hole, this," I remarked to the guide.

"It is," he agreed. "A man was murdered here only the other day."

The unexpectedness of it nearly made me drop my biscuit. However, I managed to save it, and waited to hear about the murder.

But the guide was silent. He gave me the idea

that murders were so common hereabouts that it was hardly worth while explaining them.

I had to ask and ask again before I got the story out of the fellow.

"Well," he said at last, "I will tell you how it was. An Arab was resting here, just like ourselves. Another Arab was watching him from that hill you see in front. The resting Arab after looking suspiciously round furtively hid something in his turban. Then at once he laid down and went to sleep. The Arab who had watched him from the hill stole over the intervening ground, crept up to the sleeping man and killed him with a stone. When the murderer undid the turban to get at the treasure, he found—four small onions!"

We got safely clear of this unhallowed spot and resumed our uneventful way. That night we camped near a very small village, if I may call it such—all the houses were more than half underground. The usual yapping dogs were plentiful. When we started to pitch camp some hundred yards away from this village all the men-folk came to have a look at me. I inquired of them what animals there were in the hills. Jackal, boar, gazelle, moufflon, they replied, were the only things they had seen.

They told me a little girl had strayed from the village and got lost. Although search was made all night and next day, they finally only found her clothing. The jackals had killed her in a ravine and eaten her. I asked them if they were not going to kill all the jackals in revenge, but there was no great enthusiasm to do

this. The girl's death was to them simply something that had happened. They displayed when talking of it the usual Arab, Kismet sort of attitude.

The farther we penetrated into the mountains the rougher became the going. If the reader wishes to learn more on this subject the accompanying illustrations will be found informative.

For long distances we had to go very slowly and carefully. There were dried-up river-beds to get across, and rough mountain ravines.

I had got out of one of these places after a stiff climb, and was resting under the brow of a little crested hill, when two magnificent golden eagles came round the corner not twenty yards away from me. They did not seem at all frightened, and I had a splendid view of them, the rest of their flight being continued below me. As they were going past me they calmly looked my way, turning their heads slowly and taking stock of me without altering their course.

Later on I was having a quiet pipe when a couple of falcons made their appearance, sailing round a cliff close by me. It is in these mountains the Biskra Arabs get the young falcons which, after training, their Kaid, mentioned further on, uses when he goes hawking in the Desert.

On and on we went through weird formations of volcanic country. Sometimes a mule was down, sometimes a man, both the worse for the fall. Eventually we met an old mountain Arab who agreed to act as guide. This I was very thankful for, as my guide and

cook had been quarrelling. They both claimed they knew the country, but both had different ideas about it, and I found both to be wrong. On two occasions we were landed in rough ravines from which we only got out by retracing our steps, and this was very difficult to do on account of the huge boulders.

At one place where we camped for the night we found a little water, suitable only for the animals. After the camp was pitched the cook discovered that we had very little of our own water left. "It must have run out!" he said in excuse.

In the early morning after a cold ride we suddenly came upon a stone village, with a white mosque standing out in relief, a village totally different from anything to be seen for fifty miles round. A few goats were visible, but there was little cultivation to be seen. On leaving the village we went along a river-bed pathway for a quarter of a mile, and then along a goat track which petered out after a while in rough rocky country.

Here the new guide confessed he was lost. This was rather disheartening! However, we were lucky enough to meet another Arab, who told us the path had been washed away. Taking us back with him for half a mile he put us on to our bearings again. But the route he pointed out brought us to the edge of a big cliff. Unfortunate! However, the new guide seemed to think it was all right. "There is the place where the Cave Dwellers live," he said, pointing to a mountain miles away.

In front of us were rugged valleys to be crossed, and I could not for the life of me see how we were going to find our way down to the river-bed hundreds of feet below. Eventually by retracing our steps a few hundred yards this was accomplished.

On getting down to the river level I noticed a short distance away a couple of stone houses half buried in the ground. They looked for all the world as if they had dropped ten thousand feet out of the sky. My guide informed me that a mountain chief lived there, and that we ought to call and pay our respects to him. So I called on the chief. It was some twenty minutes after my arrival before I was received. I understood the reason for the delay when I entered the room. A beautiful new carpet which covered the floor had just been put down. A table and a chair made up the rest of the furniture of the room. The chief, my host, was a man of some sixty years of age. His very intelligent face peeped out of a beard. We shook hands, and he at once sat down on the carpet. Presently delicious coffee, honey, dates, and shelled walnuts were brought in, all of which I did justice to and enjoyed exceedingly. I was very surprised at receiving such luxurious treatment. Who would have expected hospitality like this in a God-forsaken, barren, rocky, sandy wilderness ?

My host was a very delightful specimen of the mountain Arab. After I told him of a remedy for an ailment which had kept him awake for nearly a week, and had explained my mission, he offered to give me a letter which I was to show on entering the valley

Rough country.

A Bedouin camp in the Desert.

Facing page 164.

where the cliffs began. What I took to be one of his followers, a man who I found out afterwards was also his secretary, now came in and, squatting at my feet, wrote the letter at the chief's dictation in Arabic. The chief handed it to me with his blessing (or was it Allah's ?) He explained to me that the letter said that I was to be trusted and treated with the utmost consideration. I believed him. But the letter was written in Arabic, as I have said. It might have contained an order to cut my throat for anything I could make out of it.

Soon off we went again. After a climb we got out of the rough valley. I now urged my caravan on, as I was anxious to get to the cliffs before dark. As we passed along the valley I caught sight of a couple of gazelle on my left gazing at me some five hundred yards away. They were amongst some short bushes in the river-bed. I watched these shy little animals through my glasses. They were in appearance very like Thompson's gazelle in Central Africa, as will be seen from the illustration.

On topping one of the many queerly-formed little hills—they were of every shape and size now—I noticed evidences of the Roman occupation. I decided to have a careful look at these on my return, and hurried on. I was well ahead of my caravan now. My horse seemed as fresh as ever, and I like to think he shared my excitement when I turned the corner and found myself facing a wonderful and interesting valley. A very high cliff ran for a mile on the left-hand side of this valley,

rising hundreds of feet. At the foot of this cliff was a dry water-course and some pools. I saw beautiful palms and other vegetation. I hurried towards this welcome sight.

It was not long before there came the usual barking of dogs. In fact, a whole troop of dogs came out to meet me. They looked really dangerous. Then a couple of men appeared. By this time, as I had stopped, the rest of my caravan had joined me.

Our reception was rather a cold one, but the men thawed a little when I produced the letter from the chief. Another man and a boy now came along and eyed us over. They were rather sullen, too, I thought. My guide explained to me in a tone of some annoyance that there was not very much chance of us getting food for our animals or fuel for the fire at this place. But the guide took too much for granted. In my various journeys I had met sullen natives before, and knew how to deal with them. I smiled at the most sullen-looking man of them all. Then, bending, picked up a small stone, and making a pass—I am a bit of a conjuror—showed him a piece of silver. The change of the atmosphere was sudden and remarkable. Here was a new arrival who could change stones into money! "You will get all you want now," I said to the guide. "Yes, and get us all murdered afterwards as well," was his reply.

Pulling out his revolver, he said in a louder tone, "I must let them know we are armed with all this money about."

The entrance to the cliff dwellers' valley.

Facing page 166.

Wood was soon forthcoming, the tent was put up, and a good fire got going, not before it was wanted, as the night wind had turned out bitterly cold. However, a cup of coffee helped to make things more comfortable.

By the time it was dark I was receiving a few visitors. About a dozen Arabs turned up. I quickly discovered that they were fully aware of the value of money. What they wanted, I found, was to keep me busy all night making money out of bits of rock. I think they would have brought half the cliff to be manipulated if I had allowed them to do so.

Offers of all kinds were showered on me. If I would only show them how to turn stones into money!

In between these conversations about finance we talked of other things. I was anxious to know something of the fauna and flora of the place. What animals inhabited the hills near them? I asked. Were there any wild boar and jackal? The latter, they told me, came down nightly to the dried-up river-bed within twenty yards of where I was going to sleep. Lions they had never seen, but they had heard their fathers speak of them. Wild boars they had seen. I was not surprised to hear it, although I knew that these animals were commoner north of the mountains. I have made many inquiries, but I have never found any of the present generation in Algeria that has seen a lion at large. But these mountain men had seen—I learnt it without surprise—another interesting gentleman, one which natives in other parts of the world have reported to me as existing in their

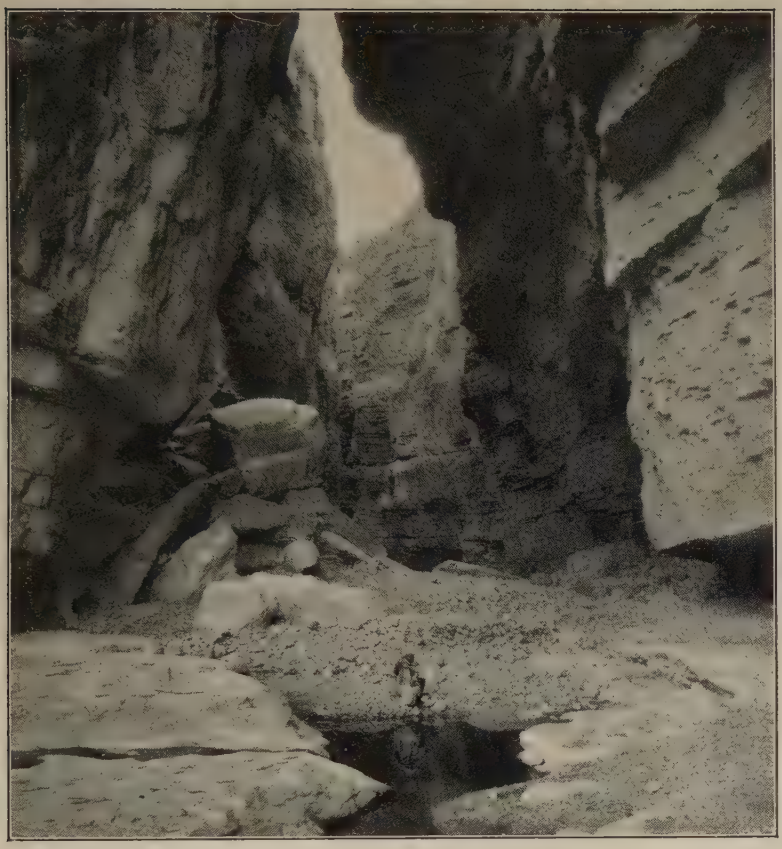
neighbourhood, a snake with hair or mane along its back. This snake, these villagers here said, never ran away from you, but immediately attacked you or gave chase at great speed. It could go as fast as a goat one youthful member of the company told me. I at once asked them to go out with my party next day and search for this snake, but they said the weather was too cold, and that he was only seen in the hot season.

This is the third time in my life that I have missed seeing a snake that grew hair two inches long on its back. It exists, so various informants have confidently asserted to me, in Borneo, Africa North, and Central Africa. Of course, there may be something in what these Arabs told me. They, at any rate, do not see snakes through the neck of a whisky bottle.

I did not see any really old men in this village, nor indeed many in Algeria. Many people I became acquainted with on my former visit, people of about my own age, were now dead, I found. They die young in Algeria, I suppose, as they do in most parts of Africa.

These villagers did not seem at all unhappy. They are a cheerful people, enjoying a cheap cigarette as much as any wealthy man would an expensive cigar in a London club. Given health and what they think is a sufficiency, most people, savages and otherwise, have happy times. That is my experience.

My guide slept very badly that night. He was really scared by his surroundings, and I don't wonder at it. Weird sounds broke out continually, and the



Pools of silence.

Facing page 168.

dogs awoke and kept on barking for hours. Next morning I was up long before the sun, fully dressed and ready for my work. Whilst trying to warm myself by a little fire I had still more visitors. A woman and three children this time. The woman did not have any covering over her face. To see her with her children enjoy the warmth of the fire and the few biscuits I gave them afforded me great pleasure.

I set up my cine camera and got a short study of this family, after which I started to make a tour of inspection of the cave or cliff dwellers. By now fires were smoking at different points high up on the cliff, and the inhabitants were all astir. As I photographed them I made a lot of inquiries. What was that big rock standing by itself on the left, and why had it such a peculiar shape? was one. Down I was taken to be shown where a big slice of this rock had slipped off and half-blocked the ravine. Then my informant began to climb the cliff again, agile as a mountain sheep. Some sixty feet up—it was almost a precipice—he caught hold of a rope which I had not before noticed, and quickly climbed a further thirty feet and disappeared in a crevice of the rock. I was told he could climb to the top.

That solid piece of rock I had asked about I further discovered was the great beehive which supplied all the community with honey.

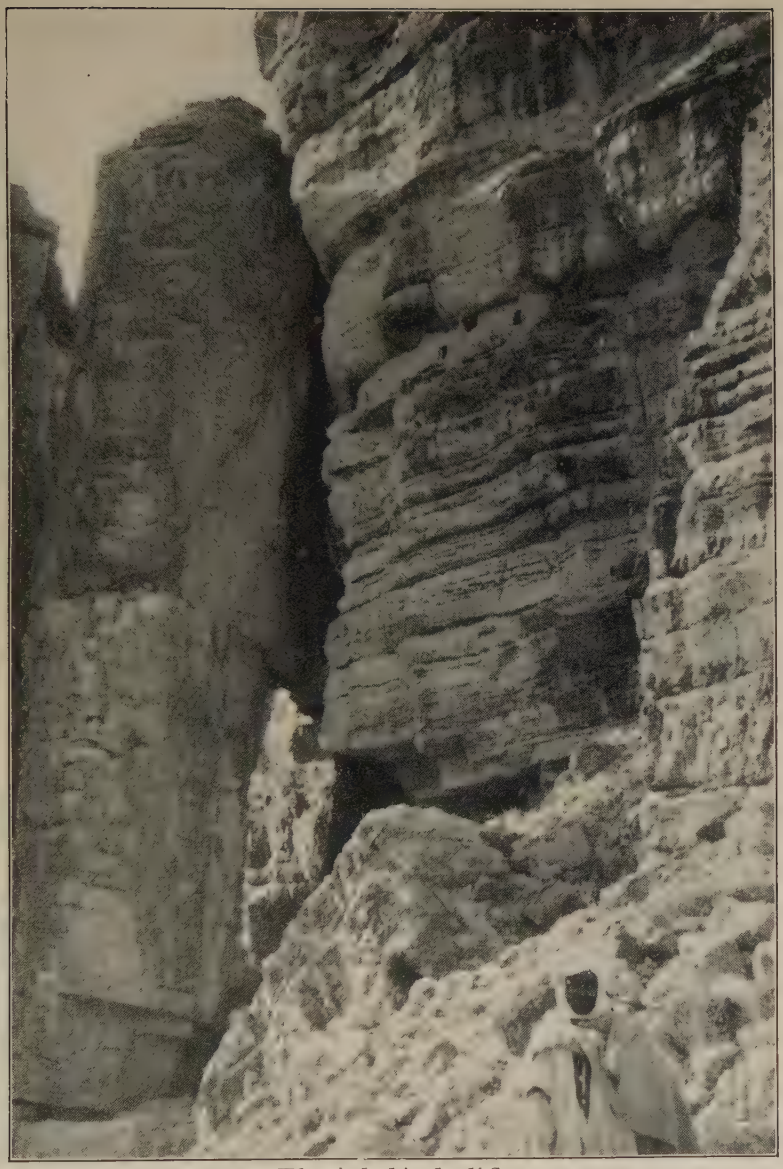
Back the climber came and then we started for the dwellings in the cliff. First we had to creep through a small hole in the rock in order to reach the ledge

which was at the bottom of the climb. As I weigh over seventeen stone I had to undress before I could get through that hole. In the process of getting through, the rough, jagged rock claimed a bit of me. However, I got through, had my clothes pushed after me, and in a moment was presentable again.

Next I scrambled up the face of the cliff, and then, with the friendly aid of a rope, climbed to another ledge. This awful path was apparently the only way of getting to the dwellings. It is a good thing these people are not drinkers. If they were they couldn't possibly get home at all.

Ingenious wooden winches were fixed in two places on the rocky ledge, their use being to draw heavy loads up from below to the dwellings. Women were not much in evidence. They never are much where the Arab lives, and here I saw only three altogether, two of which I managed to photograph. The view from this place is an impressive one. It is a regular eyrie, and any enemy who attacked it would have no chance at all. I saw a couple of falcons at one end of the cliff and a couple of jackdaws at the other. These seemed to have the place to themselves so far as bird life was concerned.

The women do most of the work in this part of the world. I observed them tilling little patches of ground only a few yards long in some places. They seemed very satisfied with themselves. My tent had been pitched when we arrived on a little flat patch of sand against a big boulder which I thought would be



The inhabited cliffs. Facing page 170.

some shelter from the cold wind. On my return from seeing the cliff dwellings I noticed for the first time that the site was right on the edge of the little cemetery, which was difficult to distinguish from the rest of the ground, stones and graves harmonising so well with each other.

"Truly a wonderful resting-place, this," I thought as I smoked my pipe, "both for the living and for the dead."

I watched the sun begin to set. The solitude and silence at that moment were in keeping with my feelings.

"So near, this place," I thought, "to Biskra, which at a certain season of the year may be described as almost a part of Mayfair, and yet how different are the people here."

Some of them had apparently never seen a white man before, judging from the way they had crowded round, staring at me. They live a life apart, do these cliff dwellers, cultivating the little soil they possess assiduously, grazing their scanty flocks on the infrequent herbage, eking out a living as best they can.

The country in which they live is wildly desolate and beautiful, a country of grey rocks on which scrub grows sparsely, whilst patches of ill-nourished date palms stand beside the nearly dried-up streams.

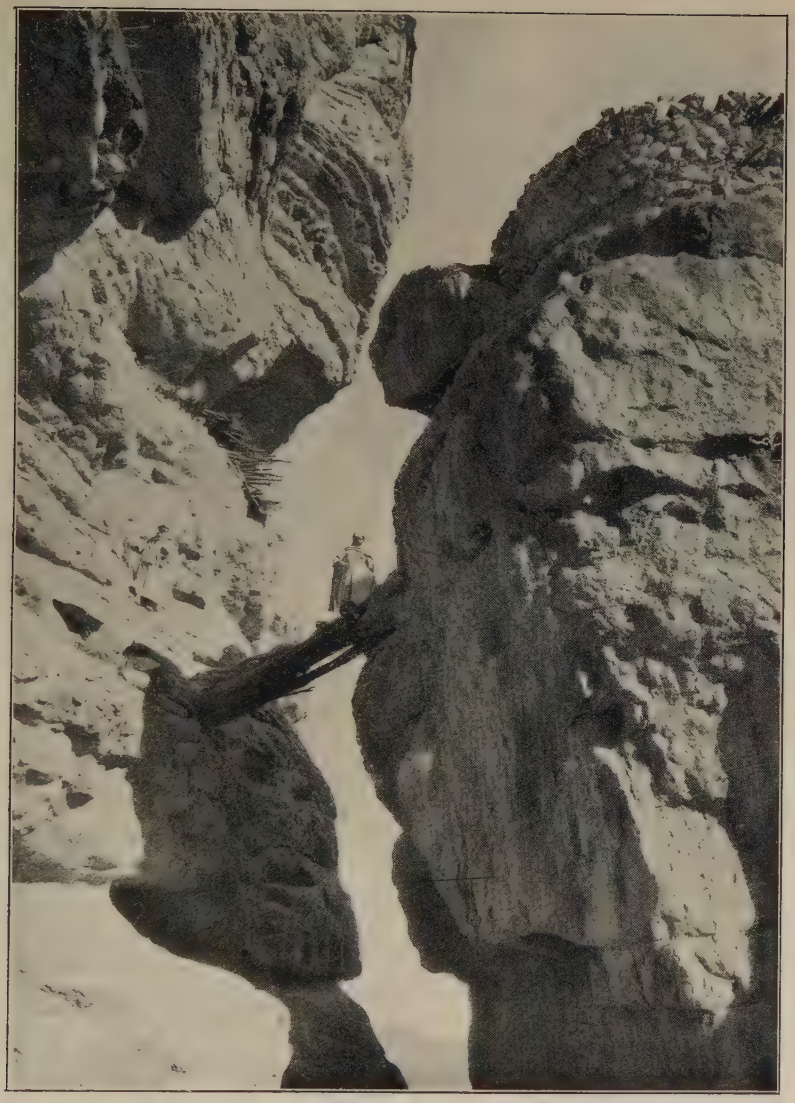
About me was the panorama of the Aurèsian Range, some of the mountains sparsely covered with vegetation. Nearer at hand were desert crags and hills, their sides now covered with the pink and purple tints

characteristic of such a scene at eventide. The smoke of the cooking fires ascended from the adjacent huts straight up to the crystal, cloudless sky.

These people, under the beneficent rule of the French, find that there is no longer need for them to dwell in such natural fortresses as they have been in the habit of doing. No longer do Arab raiders come from the Sahara, sack their villages and carry off their women. They can live unmolested in the plains, beside trees and streams, in a more natural situation. Consequently the houses on the cliffs are in many instances falling into disrepair. But enough of them remain even in this district to render an examination of it interesting and instructive.

The cliff houses, often mere hovels containing a single apartment, are usually in a dirty state. They are built of untrimmed stones and mud loosely piled, and every cranny in them is crowded with the possessions of the family. The light is obtained often only by opening the door. Every drop of water and all the food, fuel, and other necessaries have to be carried from the valley below. This task devolves on the women and girls. No wonder the tired creatures grow old before their time. And no wonder they have no inclination to keep the inside of the houses clean.

What other time they have at their disposal after acting as porters these hard-worked creatures spend in the usual ways of primitive women. They spin, weave cloth, wash clothes, make pottery and grass mats, pound the corn for the kous-kous, and till the ground.



The cliff dwellers' home.

Facing page 172.

To do all these things they have to get up very early in the morning. In fact, it must be a great nuisance to the male cliff dweller that his wife, by making such a noise in the wee sma' hours, disturbs his rest!

The male cliff dweller is by no means so industrious as his wife or wives. I fancy he would have a contempt for the average American or European, who slaves day and night in order that his wife may have a "good time." That is, if he knew that there exist men in the world who are such simpletons. Like the rest of the male denizens of Algeria, he believes in doing as little as possible. He gossips, bargains, hunts, but helps in the household work only when it is absolutely necessary. Of course, his needs are few and easily supplied. The daily kous-kous, a little coffee, some coarse Algerian tobacco, cotton for turbans and shirts, soap sometimes. He is seldom ill. The air of the Desert is wonderful medicine. For minor ailments he has native remedies. For serious illness he only has one, "Kismet! It is the Will of Allah!"

On my way back I stopped at the place where I had seen the work of the Romans, and took the photograph on the opposite page. The trimming of the stone might have been done two months before, so fresh was it, instead of a thousand or so years ago. I had a careful look all round, but could not see any further remains. Still, the conclusion is fixed in my mind that another Roman city lies buried somewhere near here.

The old guide, who is to be seen in the picture seated on the stone, was born in those hills.

He asked me in Arabic, " Why are these stones here on this hill ? "

When the question had been translated to me I answered, " You live here and should know."

He shook his head, and that was all the information I got from him. My Biskra guide opined that a road must have been made somewhere from the hills to the Desert, and that the Romans dragged the stones along it with the intention of building a big city. There was not any water about, however. So either the guide's hypothesis was wrong, or the country must have dried up very much since Roman times. It probably has. The rainfall over all North Africa was much bigger centuries ago.

During the night we camped uncomfortably, for it rained heavily and was bitterly cold. Next day we came across a man with hundreds of goats,who exhibited great anger because I held him and his herd up to photograph them. Still, he was different from a good many other angry Arabs I have met, who immediately after a picture was taken of them demanded money for the great privilege I had been afforded by them. I may have incurred a little "Evil Eye" from this angry goatherd, for very soon afterwards as we went along I had a tumble. I had forgotten my stirrups were not fastened to the saddle, but simply tied on to a loose bit of rope. Just before we stopped at a place for luncheon I caught sight of a curious beetle. Quickly

Roman remains on the mountains.

Facing page 174.

pulling my foot out of one stirrup to alight I naturally left all my weight on the other. The result was that I quickly landed on my back on the roadway. I was not much hurt, but a bit shaken.

My Biskra guide kept saying, "Didn't I warn you to be careful." But that was not much consolation.

We lunched quickly, then moved on again. I rode on before the rest of the party, and after we had been going a couple of hours found myself some quarter of a mile ahead. On looking back after crossing a very bad patch of ground I saw something had happened to the caravan, and hurried back. I found my guide had let his mule fall. He had come down with it, cutting his head and hands on the rocks, and damaging himself pretty badly.

"I told you to be careful!" sprang to my lips. But I refrained from uttering the remark, although the temptation was very great.

Just before dark it started raining again very hard. The cold became intense.

The next morning I found that my old hill guide had been anxiously asking my ordinary guide during the night if he thought the money I was going to pay him for his services was quite safe. He had a great fear at the back of his mind apparently that after I left what I gave him might turn to stone. Just before we parted company, at a place where there were millions of stones about the size of a thrush's egg, he very gently asked me (through my Biskra guide) if I would do him one great favour.

"What is the favour?" I inquired.

"Show me your magic," was the reply, "so that I can make stones into money."

My Biskra guide explained further that the old man did not want to have to work any more. He would much rather change stones into money instead.

"Tell him," I replied, "that I cannot assist him. If I did he would then be the richest man in Algeria."

As I said, there were millions of little stones visible in the Desert around us. The old man looked at them greedily. Then a cunning light came into his eye.

"Tell your master," he said to the Biskra guide, "that if he will instruct me with his secret I promise not to turn more than five francs' worth of stones into money a day."

When he found he could not be obliged he appeared a wee bit disappointed, and again inquired of my guide if he thought it was quite safe for him to take the money I had given him, showing it to him at the same time. I had intended to give him an extra tip. With an inward smile I asked him to let me see the money. Palming five more francs in my hand, I immediately handed him his money back plus the five francs. He nearly fell down with astonishment. He then said to my guide that he was quite satisfied, being sure that if he kept this magic money of mine in a box it would grow.

Having said good-bye to this dear old chap, we continued our return journey to Biskra by a slightly different route. We passed some caves where the

Romans and others had lived in their time, and which are now uninhabited. On getting out on to the Desert again I spotted half a dozen gazelle and a couple of moufflon, but found they were too difficult to stalk. Although I crawled on my hands and knees for a couple of hundred yards or so, they kept me at a distance. Try how I would I could not get nearer to them than some four hundred yards. So I had to give it up.

Whilst resting I pictured to myself the animals who used to roam this part of the country, such as lion, gnu, greater antelope, and ostrich.

There is not the shooting to be had in Algeria nowadays that could be obtained when I was there last. Game is getting scarcer every day.

Egrets, duck, teal, flamingos, grebes and sometimes swans are still fairly common on the lakes at certain times of the year. The marshes contain a plentiful supply of snipe and woodcock, and on the plains one, of course, finds quail and partridges. But the larger game have almost disappeared. In the old days the panther was plentiful in Northern Algeria, and was dreaded because of its cunning and climbing ability even more than the lion.

French sportsmen were devoted to panther shooting. I heard this tale of an adventure of one of these gentlemen :

He, according to his custom, set out one evening on a shooting expedition accompanied by a number of Arabs, who carried a nanny-goat and kid. They came to the spot where the panther had been seen,

and tied the goat to a stake. The Frenchman hid in a hole in the ground, holding the goat's kid in his arm.

When quiet reigned and the Arabs had gone he pinched the kid. A few pinches and the kid was bleating distressfully. That set the goat going. The noise of its distress echoed and re-echoed through the wood, and Mr. Panther was on the spot in no time.

He seized the goat and tried to carry it away, and the tethering rope breaking, at once succeeded.

The Frenchman in a hurry fired and broke both the panther's forelegs, on which the panther fell down as if dead. Out ran the Frenchman, only to have the panther get up suddenly and jump at him. The Frenchman fired his second barrel. The panther, mortally wounded, bit him in the cheek. Clasped in each others' arms, both rolled down the hill.

Hearing the shooting the Arabs rushed back, found the panther dead, and the Frenchman lying unconscious, his face and right arm bleeding profusely.

However, the wounded one got well, and in three months' time was shooting panther as hard as ever.

The French Government used to offer a reward of fifty francs for every panther killed.

It was barren country that I looked upon as I sat smoking. Rocks scorched by the sun, grey boulders, earth and heaped-up sand comprised the foreground. In the distance, just visible against the clear horizon, were the scattered palms of a small oasis, to the north the magnificent panorama of the mountains.

But such a scene in the full blaze of the African day looks somewhat garish. Sunset or moonlight are the most beautiful times to look at this country in which the Arabs have made their home.

And of the two I prefer sunset, at that moment when the last rays of the setting sun have ceased to shine on the countryside, and only the red sky tells of the past furnace heat of the day which is just drawing to a close.

I have seen sunsets in most parts of the world. In Arizona, where the dying light turns into crimson rocks, rugged mountains, cañons with which that arid state is adorned ; in India, Borneo, and the Shetlands ; on the Pacific, where the water glowing like a mirror reflects atoll and palm ; by flat-topped Table Mountain ; in the Matoppos, where Rhodes now sleeps ; but none of these scenes at the death of day can beat for beauty the going down of Mister Sun as I remember it in North Africa.

The cupolas and pinnacles of the mosques stand out delicate against the vivid sky. The square-built houses are dyed pink by its reflection, the drooping fronds of the palms about them stand out calm and black like silhouettes. The dunes are like mountains, the string of camels passing over the boulder-strewn Desert seem still as if carved in ebony. At one moment the scene looks like a painting in red and black and gold, the next moment it is coloured in all the delicate hues known to the artist. And the wonderful sky itself looks so calm, so clear, that one would like to go and bathe

right in the middle of it. The hues of the sunset play on the sky, saffron, pink, scarlet, crimson, pink again and gold; at last, as night sweeps over the hushed Desert, changing into the best hue of all, a hue of deepest violet, dusted with a multitude of softly-shining stars.

I knocked out my pipe. This was morning, not sundown. I had had my rest. The Arabs were getting impatient. It was time to be moving on.

After some places in Borneo, where you have to cut your way through a dense jungle in a moist heat which is always nearly intolerable, this trek through the local Desert was a picnic.

Except for the off-chance of encountering a band of bad Arabs, there was no danger to speak of. Open country it was usually. You could see who was coming miles away. Of course, in the boulder-strewn defiles you could not see so well. But the Desert air makes the heart light, makes you " feel good," as our friends across the Atlantic say. Personally I felt that morning that I did not care if a dozen murderous nomads were lying in wait for me and my horse behind the next grey boulder.

The going was awful just then. Hardly a sign of vegetation was to be seen. Not a tree! Not a blade of grass! Just sand, sand, sand, a multitude of grey boulders flung down in the valley as if a giant's young family had been standing on the frowning precipice ahead having a morning's amusement at stone pitching. And the sun glared down!

Our gas company at home is always sending me circulars condemning radiators and anthracite stoves and praising gas fires. They say that radiant heat is better for the human frame than the convective article supplied by the radiator. I quite agree with them. I feel always absolutely buoyant in the glare of the North African sun.

My Arabs, leisurely creatures, are some way behind me now. I draw up my horse, an eager fellow he is, always forging ahead of the rest of the party, and watch them coming along.

They don't believe in hurrying, and really, considering the experience they must have had, tackle the rough going very clumsily, in my opinion.

What a place for lions this must have been once, I reflect, looking around me. Plenty of gazelle and moufflon to be had, water to be found always, not very far away. And quite enough of cover available among the boulders.

But the game has died out, been shot out, that is. It will die out just the same in another hundred years in other places, such as Central Africa, for instance, where I have counted big game by the thousand. It makes you sad to think of this, but then everything must give way to the march of civilisation!

I should not have been surprised had I run across a porcupine or two during this journey, though they are not common hereabouts. This interesting and extraordinary-looking rodent lives in burrows or amongst rocks. Those who are about to attempt to do anything

with the porcupine I advise to be very careful. He is not a gentleman that runs head first at you and bites. He does the reverse. At great speed he runs backwards, and is very good at aiming at your legs, piercing them with those long quills of his, and you are lucky if he leaves less than half a dozen sticking into you. He will drop quite a number when frightened. Once in Central Africa I sat on a collection my black boy had made. I don't collect porcupine quills any more!

As I rode along I saw three or four jerboas, but they quickly made for their little holes in the sandy hills, and although I spent some time in trying to dig one out, I had to give it up. All the way along this portion of the Desert the crested larks showed up in hundreds, noticeable because of their peculiar short flight and crippled song. Late in the evening we arrived at a village where we sought the shelter of mud walls in a yard. Here I slept, and slept very well, but my guide was afraid as, so he told me, there was a man in the village who bore him a grudge. I left him asleep with one eye open and two automatics tucked away handy.

I was more afraid of the damage my guide might do me than of his enemy. In the dark a man who is already rattled and sleeps armed to the teeth is dangerous company for his friends. I slept well as I have said, and nothing happened.

Thank goodness also, the guide never found out that the automatics he was nursing so fondly were empty!

I arose next morning before dawn. The light had

Wild boar foraging.

Porcupine.

Facing page 182.

begun to come feebly. The impassive vault of the sky stretched high above me. I watched the violet colour turn to faint primrose. The jagged rocks of distant mountains, dark masses of nearer ranges began to show, some dark and sombre. The peaks of the farthest mountains were tipped with snow. The light grew quickly brighter. The primrose changed to saffron. Jasper tints were on the edges of the sky. The highest points around grew pink, then glowed. Away to the east a red light had dawned. And in it gleamed the spears of the sun.

And then the sun came up himself, immense, relentless, in a blaze of glory.

Whilst having coffee I was told a story of an Arab boy who found a dead gazelle, cut off a portion of it, then wandered past the house belonging to a Frenchman. On seeing the house dog he at once gave him the meat, simultaneously setting up a terrible howl. This fearful noise brought the good lady of the house out hurriedly. On her inquiring the cause of all his trouble the Arab boy, still blubbering for all he was worth, pointed to the dog. Sobs choked him. He could not explain. But the lady understood. She belaboured the dog for his greediness. The Arab boy with two new francs in his hand went on his way rejoicing.

Chapter VII

OUTSIDE BISKRA

I

AFTER crossing a dried-up river we made south-west for Sidi Okba. The Desert soon became a dry, flat, earthy plain, and it was not long before the palms and mud houses of the town showed clear. For at least two miles out from Sidi Okba attempts had been made to irrigate on a large scale. Some difficulty was experienced by us in crossing the narrow, deep canal that has been cut. One of my men, who was too lazy to go round to the ford, tried to cross and came to grief. We had quite a job to get the man and his tired mule out of the canal.

Gradually the mud walls of the town got closer, and finally, still feeling fresh, we entered Sidi Okba at the north-eastern end.

I cantered through the streets looking around me. The old place seemed just the same as when I saw it on my first visit. It appeared to be a bit cleaner and the flies were absent, the weather, I suppose, being too cold for them. The passage of our party raised a cloud of dust. We rode through the square portal I remembered so well, and halted in front of the oldest Mohammedan building in Africa.

Street scenes at Sidi Okba. Facing page 184.

Here is the original burial-place of that great fighter, Sidi Okba ben Nafi (Sidi is a title equivalent to "lord"), who in the early days of Mohammedanism, in the year 680, conquered with a tiny army the whole of Northern Africa from Egypt to Tangier, finally being killed near this place by Kabyles from the Aurés Mountains.

Before we entered the mosque, which is larger and better built than any in the Sahara, an Arab handed me the usual pair of slippers and removed his own shoes. We walked through the sacred parts of the mosque. The rich colouring effects inside are very striking, and impress even the most critical. Within a yard of where I stood to take a photograph of the interior, reproduced here, was the tomb or "kouba" of Okba. It looks for all the world like some city company's huge safe.

Many Arabs, in order to put themselves in good odour with the saints, make endowments to the big tombs. "Sidi Okba" has come in for its share of the generosity of the faithful. For the benefit of the students small doors some few feet from the ground had been inserted in one wall of the mosque when it was built. These doorways are still in evidence. They are only large enough to allow the student to enter the niche he occupies. In olden times a certain number of students were always exempt from warfare, the idea being, I suppose, that they should sit at home and pray for those who were fighting.

Armed with a candle, for the stairs of the old tower

were in darkness, we mounted the steps leading to the minaret, where a wonderful view is obtained over the great wastes of Desert on the one side and the Aurés Mountains, which I had just left, on the other. The flat foreground of Desert beyond the town shimmered in the rays of the African sun. I saw the few palms of a small oasis. Beyond this no shade of any sort. On coming out of the door I turned round to expose a plate, and then it suddenly struck me that the building had been altered. A roof had been added, and the door was now sheltered from the elements.

I mentioned this door earlier in this book. It was, I was told on my last visit to Algeria, originally covered with gold, and on this visit I had been informed by the Timgad people that it belonged to the stone framework which had been discovered there. The thing that I should like to know is how did the door get from Timgad to Sidi Okba, which must be at least a hundred miles away. Was it brought by some devotee ?

When I pointed out to the Arab the alteration to the building I had noticed he was surprised, as he had not the faintest idea I had ever been there before. Another young Arab devout came up and began to talk. He was much too up-to-date for me, nearer to the dandy, lady-killer type of person than any Arab I have ever seen in Algeria.

On the right-hand side of the courtyard I discovered the mosque school for religious teaching. A fair amount of chatter was going on. A beam of light coming through a broken part of the roof illuminated the room. With

Carved wooden doorway of mosque at Sidi Okba, which fits the stone section at Timgad.

(Said at one time to have been covered in gold.) Facing page 186.

its aid I could only see the youngsters engaged in their studies. Directly they caught sight of me their gabble increased. I verily believe this sudden outburst of vocal energy was all put on for my benefit, just to show the visitor what earnest young Moslems they all were.

On my coming out of the courtyard of the mosque into the street my guide handed me a cup of coffee. A crowd collected around me, and I was paid every polite attention possible by the village policeman and a couple of the village guides. What a modern way these Sidi Okba guides have! My village guide—he insisted on my employing him—handed me over to the mosque guide, just as the outside porter hands you over to the platform porter at one of our big railway stations, in order that you shall have to shell out two tips instead of one. When I had done shelling out to the Okba guides, I solemnly asked these pests, holding my hand out in turn, what they were going to give me. They smiled. Upon which my guide broke in and explained to them that probably I knew more about Sidi Okba than they did, as I had been over the place before they were born. Yells of laughter from the crowd!

We passed through narrow, sandy lanes out of the little town and through its uninteresting outskirts. I was pleased to get on to the Desert again, but it is a civilised Desert here. We were now a mere twelve miles from Biskra. When we had gone some distance we came up with what was to me a most extraordinary sight, some thirty camels jogging along in the sand

laden with all sorts of modern household goods. To this day I cannot forget the sight of one poor brute, who had a huge wardrobe on one side of him and a chest of drawers on the other. Another camel carried a mattress, bed, and two or three chairs, and I don't think I should have been surprised if I had seen another carrying a grand piano! It was the first time I had ever seen a complete set of household furniture going along on camels. I don't think a similar sight has ever been seen by another traveller. To my regret I hadn't a single bit of film left to record it. "What would the sainted Sidi Okba ben Nafi have said," I pondered, "if he could have seen these camels and their loads, if he had known how modern civilisation is gradually corroding away the ancient way of life of the followers of Islam?"

II

Yes, modern material civilisation is corroding Islam as it is all other religions.

Yet any man, be he Christian or not, must respect the Arab for the way he upholds his faith. This strange creed of theirs they believe in with fervour. To them Mohammed, the man of Mecca, ranks above all other men and next to the Almighty. The book he is supposed to have written, the Koran, not only takes the place with them of our Bible, but according to its teaching their daily lives are arranged and even the civil law among their self-governing communities is administered.

Without venturing an opinion as to the divinity of Mohammed's inspiration or otherwise, I must say that, in my opinion, he knew his Arabs. He knew what a man living in a hot country needed, and what he ought to be made, for his bodily health, to avoid. Wine was bad for the man who drank it, and the man who drank it to excess in a hot country, Mohammed had observed, became not only a nuisance to his neighbours, but also a danger to the welfare of the state. Therefore rule out wine. Dirt was equally undesirable, bringing as it did all sorts of illnesses in its train. Men must therefore be made to wash and wash frequently, when they made their toilet and before they performed the other functions of the day.

But food was good and therefore sacred, while dirt was bad and therefore of the devil. Therefore Mohammed ordered all good Moslems to wash their bodies on certain occasions with their left hand. He forbade usury too, and did not encourage promiscuity of the sexes. But he had to make concessions to popular feeling. So he reduced the number of wives allowed to an Arab of that time to three.

I have said or inferred just now that the Koran was written by Mohammed. But no Mohammedan thinks this. He believes that it was sent down from the highest heaven to the Angel Gabriel, who happened to be in the lowest, and that Gabriel revealed it to Mohammed in sections. The Prophet's disciples also have another sacred book, viz. a book handed down

from the Prophet's day, giving an account of his life and his sayings.

There are several sects of Mohammedans. The Persians, for instance, are Shi-ites, that is people who believe in the divinity of certain of Mohammed's descendants. The Arabs are Sunnites, and do not. But these are matters of argument for the learned.

The first duty of the Moslem is to recite the creed and the ordained prayers daily. It is for the purpose of giving the signal for the saying of these prayers that the muezzin ascends to the minaret of the mosque, or if the town be small and minarets are not, to the roof of a building. You see the Mohammedans in all countries at the very moment when the sun dips put down their praying mats, no matter where they are, and without thought or shame pray fervently to Allah, using the prescribed prayers. Stately Arabs throw themselves on the sand and, face almost touching it, begin their evening prayer. Sunset is the hour of holy Islam, when her devotees in their millions turn towards Mecca with passionate belief and unreasoning faith. The turbaned priests in their flowing white robes are bowed too. The whole Desert, Africa, Asia, the World, is full of prostrate men.

It is the duty of a Mohammedan to give alms. This duty he carries out in many cases to the best of his ability. But the Arab tends to be avaricious, and perhaps he might give a little more freely than he does.

Another duty of the Mohammedan is to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, and it is extraordinary with what keenness the true believers carry out this precept. At the appointed time of the year not only do Arabs and others flock towards Arabia from all over Africa, but they come in ships even from Borneo and the farthest parts of Malaya. The sanitary conditions of Arabia under the Turkish Government were not all they should be, and yearly pilgrims to the number of thousands used to perish, and probably still do perish on the way, that is if they ever got so far as Arabia. Women perform the haj as well as men. Imagine the faith of a Mohammedan woman who has lived all her life in a Borneo harem and speaks a tongue which few can understand, imagine the faith she must have to sally forth from the jungle in her old age, embark on a steamer—she has probably never seen one before—and, herded with other pilgrims like cattle in the 'tween decks, sail past Singapore, across the Indian Ocean, up the Red Sea, and cross that stony Arabian wilderness!

Harpies batten on the pilgrims at every stage. Thieves plunder them, so do the people of Mecca, who are very holy, but most unscrupulous. Most of the pilgrims who arrive home again arrive "broke to the wide." But poverty does not worry them. They have made the pilgrimage and Paradise is sure.

The last of Mohammed's orders to his disciples—I mention it last because certainly the carrying out of this order by the disciples themselves forms the

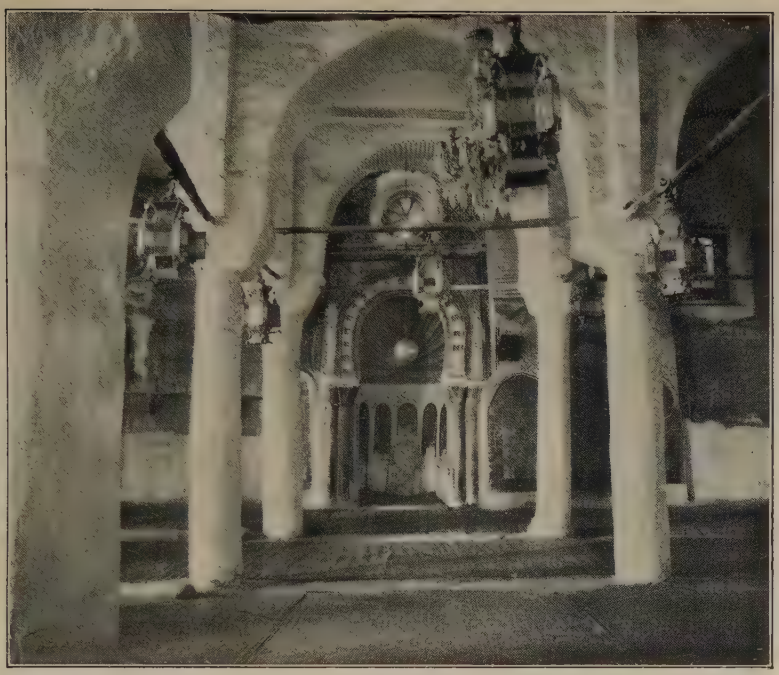
most interesting of spectacles—is that they shall all fast during the month of Ramadan.

The Mohammedan month runs from moon to moon. The Fast of Ramadan commences when the young moon is born. And no food or water must pass the lips, from sunrise to sunset, of any true believer until that moon wanes and disappears. It being a command of the Prophet that men shall fast in order to learn abstinence and self-control, no complaint is to be made during these trying hours by Mohammedans of the tortures of hunger and thirst they endure.

On the contrary, prayers of thankfulness to the Most Merciful One are the order of the day throughout the Mohammedan world during Ramadan.

On the final day of Ramadan the streets of the towns are thronged with male Moslems, waiting anxiously for the setting of the sun, when they are allowed to end their fast. They get splitting headaches through fasting. They may neither smoke nor take snuff. The face and hands may be washed, but no liquid swallowed. Mohammedans during Ramadan are always asking the time ! The discipline of a fast is a religious test. Some Arabs would rather murder a whole family than drink a mouthful of water during Ramadan.

When, on the last day, dawn breaks Ramadan has come to an end. Then the prayers of the faithful from the Koran begin. "In the name of the All Merciful God." At Biskra the grand Prayer is held on the Plateau. At an early hour the Arabs take up their position, removing their shoes, keeping their eyes



At Sidi Okba: the oldest mosque in Algeria.

Facing page 192.

always towards Mecca. The smoke of the incense rises upwards. The devotions are carried on for hours. After the day of fasting during Ramadan, at night every Arab café is filled with people eating and drinking. And when the end of Ramadan arrives I think the majority of Arabs are in their hearts very glad.

The Arabs to-day are fairly tolerant of Christians, and provided Islam is treated with respect do not attempt to call attention to the hatred which they, or rather the more fanatical of them, have at heart for the "Kafir."

There is not as a rule much to be seen in an Arab mosque. The place is usually rather like a church without aisles, pews, or any other furniture except the pulpit. The floor is covered with a carpet. At one end of the mosque is a niche. This indicates where Mecca is, and it is towards this niche that worshippers turn when repeating their prayers.

Beside this niche sits the muezzin or priest. He reads passages from the Koran to the worshippers, and very often preaches them a sermon. The walls of a mosque are never hung with pictures. The Mohammedan religion does not permit the painted representation of anything to be placed within such a building, and indeed discourages, even forbids, the painting of such pictures at all. Whitewash, plain paint, hangings, scroll decorations, arabesques and copies of verses from the Koran are the usual decorations to be seen on the walls of the average mosque. A mosque does not, however, consist of one chamber only. There are smaller rooms at the sides,

used for purposes of religious instruction and the hearing of disputes, the latter each with a separate closet attached, in which women can stand unseen by those gathered round the imaum, either to give evidence or to hear his decisions. It is said that in former days a famous Algerian builder built a mosque. It was found on completion that the plan of this mosque was cross-shape. The Dey said that the builder had insulted the Mohammedan religion, and had him promptly executed.

I have mentioned elsewhere the Arab reverence for the dead. Oftentimes during my travels I would meet burial processions. A crowd of men, some meanly clad in brown, others in their stately white burnouses, would come along the sandy road solemnly, chanting a dirge. Some carried tom-toms, which they beat slowly and rhythmically. Others bore the bier on a couple of long poles. Frequently the funeral procession would halt for the bier-bearers to be changed. Everyone in the procession would wish to take his turn at that sad office, for according to the Arabs it is lucky to carry the corpse of a dead friend. The Arabs do not enclose their dead as we do. They wrap them in linen. Sometimes all the corpse is covered with that material, in other cases only the head and feet. You can usually glimpse it as the procession swings along. And as it is arrayed for the cemetery, so is it simply buried in a shallow grave.

The Arab may be a bit of a rascal, but I have a great admiration for the man who fears no one, who

kneels down and pays his homage to his God just when he thinks he ought to do so, or feels like it ; and I think if there was a little more of that spirit in our own worship, and if we let a little of what we do on Sundays dribble over into the week-days, we should be the better for it. But I am no authority on religious matters, and my only excuse for mentioning them is I have travelled greatly, and therefore am in a position to compare the disciples of each religion one with another.

The Mohammedan religion in the last fifteen years has made great strides in Africa. I have observed it. And the fervour and devotion, almost in every country, of its converts whom I have come into contact with has surprised me. Take the raw savage who acted as my camera-bearer in Central Africa. In 1909 that man had no idea of a God, except that he had a vague notion that the sun was one. In 1913, on the slopes of Mount Kenia, I saw him, head erect, step out at sunset with my Somali gun-bearer and, kneeling, pray. The Mohammedan religion with its simple materialism and grasp of reality has captured the imagination of Africa. Its teachers have got a grip of the raw material there which they will not easily relax. And mighty raw material it is. Hundreds of thousands of Africans have accepted and follow the Mohammedan faith.

III

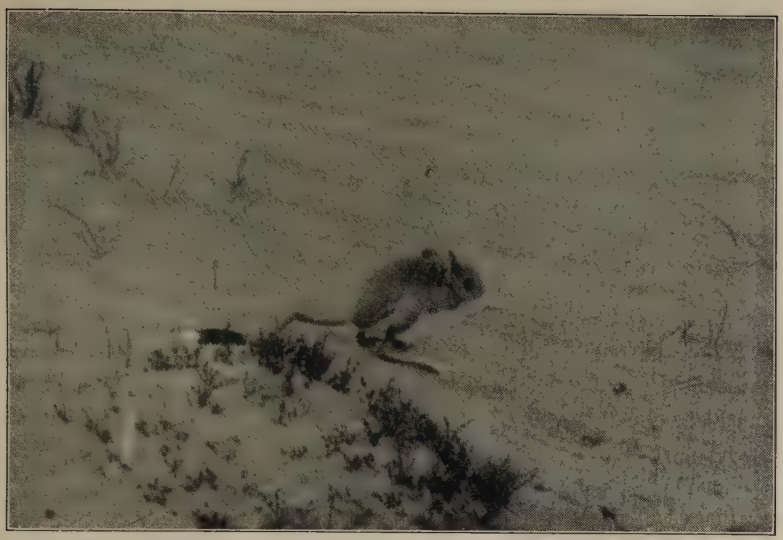
As we journeyed on and got nearer Biskra I recognised some of the places where my old guide and I used to lie prone on the uneven ground, or rather

sand, for hours at a time, and watch the jerboas, lizards and rats playing round their respective homes. The antics of the jerboas were very funny. With their long legs and tail they could bound over the little sand mounds like balls of cotton wool in a gale. The rat was a much more staid individual, and would content himself with sitting up and looking at his surroundings, nibbling the while at some very small morsel, possibly something dropped from a caravan—they are all keen on grain, are these little Desert fellows.

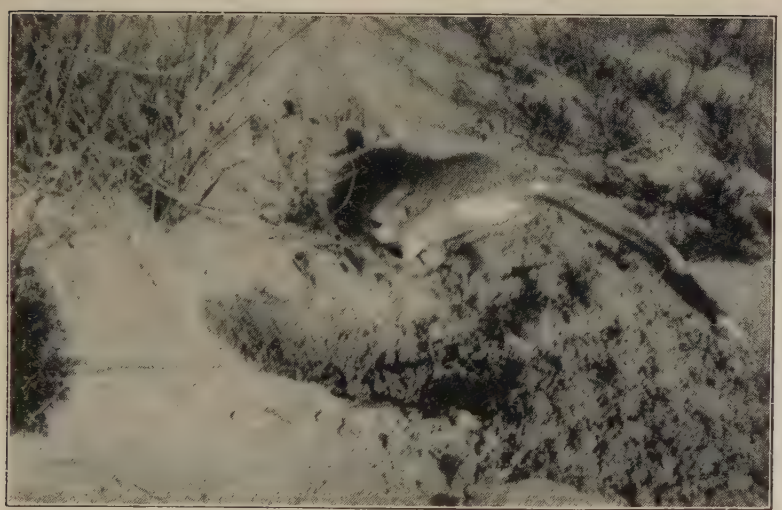
The lizards were almost as energetic as the jerboas. After sunning themselves for a few minutes they would make a dart of some three or four feet, in the hope of catching an unwary fly.

I had a boy with me one day whom I thought might be able to out-distance a jerboa if he could only get between him and his home. But the jerboa on trial proved the best runner, or I should say, rather, jumper, for his mode of progression when he is in a hurry is by jumping.

Another day, when we were beyond the Sand Dunes, not very far from Biskra, we caught a jerboa and a rat by digging for them. I was not long in taming the rat, a chubby-faced little fellow of a light brown colour with long whiskers. He was about the size of a half-grown English rat. Most of his time he spent sitting on his haunches like a rabbit. He took particular care of his whiskers, and was everlastingly stroking them with his wonderful little white hand.



Jerboa prospecting.



Jerboa digging in.

Facing page 196.

He became a great pet of mine, so much so that on several occasions after I landed him in England he went up to the City with me. What would my fair neighbours in bus and train have said had they known what was in the pocket of the man sitting next to them ?

I had no worry with this little pet of mine. He would not make his appearance unless I called him. On my return from the City in the evening he would come down from the bathroom, where he had made himself a bed round the hot-water pipe, directly he heard my voice, and would sit on my shoulder, trim his long whiskers, and sniff at my ear as a sort of greeting. I would then throw the evening or daily paper on to the mat in front of the fire, when he would immediately pop down quickly and get very busy cutting it up with his sharp teeth into small bits about an inch square. When he had finished he would heap the lot up into a sort of pyramid and carefully get under it and lie doggo, till I clapped my hands, on which he would jump a foot out of the top of the pile.

I have played this game a dozen times in an evening with him. The little fellow thoroughly enjoyed it. Night after night this performance took place. Another thing I used to do with him when he came on to the arm of my chair was to get a little treacle on a spoon and dab some of it on his whiskers. He would then drum rapidly with his hind feet in annoyance, looking angrily at me and then methodically start to clean his whiskers, of which he was really proud.

As far as I remember the only occasions on which the little fellow got into mischief were when he stole things to enlarge the nest he had carefully made round the hot-water pipe.

Whilst I was in the City one day a stray cat gave him a terrible fright. On my getting home and taking the little chap up in my hands he looked at me and expired. Again I had lost a real comrade.

IV

Travelling in the Desert near Biskra bears the same relation to the real thing as a trip up Box Hill does to an attempt to scale Skiddaw.

Here water and the other necessities of life are at hand. In the real Desert they are often very far away.

To the wanderer in the Desert it is always something to speculate about when after a few days of travelling a dark patch shapes itself in the far distance. He knows that patch to be an oasis, a place of a few huts, date palms, where he will get that precious fluid, water. This sea of sand is so vast and so dry that the mind cannot couple or connect it with the idea of water. Yet as a matter of fact fifty feet beneath as you go along there may be an abundance of water, the same water as you will find at the oasis.

These oases remind me much of the water-holes of dried-up countries I have travelled in. I remember the

fact that if it had not been for the animals I would never have found out that water existed at the places where these holes were hidden.

I think the oases were at first natural springs used by animals. Afterwards man came along and did the little bit of cultivation that exists around them. By and by the springs began to dry up. But by the time this occurred the Arabs had got the idea fixed in their heads that there was plenty of the life-giving water somewhere underneath. They tried to get it by religious methods at first. As the wells began to dry up and the danger of death by lack of water became apparent, solemn prayers were offered by the marabouts. The story goes that it was in answer to one of these prayers that Allah inspired the Arabs with the idea of sinking wells. This is a very pretty story. But I remember the fact that as the water in the water-hole gets lower and disappears the rhino or elephant digs the sandy bottom deeper and deeper, following the water down. And I naturally conclude that the Arab used his common sense like those animals.

Animals exhibit a lot of horse sense when eating and drinking are in question. I had a chimpanzee who when he could not get a preserved cherry out of a bottle with his finger would use the knuckle bone of a fowl.

Of course, the Desert is constantly at war with civilisation, and the Arab has just as much difficulty in keeping the sand out of his garden as the natives

of, say, a place like Texel in the Zuyder Zee has in keeping the water out of theirs. By erecting barriers in the Sahara, much like those in use in the north of England to prevent snow from drifting and blocking up the railway lines, I am sure the lot of the Arab would be improved, and the condition of the oases also.

Sand is constantly on the move. The Arabs say that when the wind rises the dunes walk. I was once in a sandstorm when the motion of the sand was so great that it made me feel sick, just as crossing a wide, fast river on horseback does. I began to move and the sand became stationary, and the next thing I found I had grounded on mother earth. It was an affliction of the senses through the vision that I had been suffering from, a strange sort of illusion.

Again, in early days I used to photograph from the interior of a dummy bullock my brother fixed up for me. My legs made the bullock's front legs. I had to peep through a hole in the bullock's chest in order to get my pictures. On the first occasion, when all was ready, my brother left me for an hour. But inside ten minutes I was surprised to find myself on my back. It seemed to be an impossible thing for me to stand inside that dummy bullock and in the darkness to peep through a small hole and at the same time keep my balance. Why should this have been impossible for me ? It was simply, I suppose, that some illusion of my brain in an obscure fashion affected my senses.

I noticed on this second visit of mine to the Desert that the Arab had adopted the plan of keeping the

sand back in a small way by planting rows of palm leaves. The work of watching the sand by the Arab is one of ever-increasing anxiety. Let him so much as allow himself to neglect his task for a short period, and he surely pays the penalty for his folly.

The French have done much to increase the supply of water to the oases. It was General Desvaux who first conceived the idea of artesian wells. He happened to obtain a view of an entire oasis from a hill near by. On one side the palms were flourishing, on the other the prevailing Desert wind had blown in the sand until it had half smothered them. He asked the local sheik about it, and was informed that the oasis was pretty well ruined, and that shortly the population was going to give up the interminable struggle against the sand and move on elsewhere. This caused him to think, and he conceived the idea of instituting artesian wells in Algeria.

The first artesian well was sunk in Tamerna in 1856. In a fortnight water-bearing strata was pierced and a big stream of the precious fluid gushed forth. The joy of the Arabs was good to see. Pilgrims flocked to the place. The marabouts gave it the name " Place of the Fountains of Peace."

There was some delay in reaching water when the second well was bored, and although the Arabs were disappointed, a certain pleasure was to be observed on the faces of the marabouts, who had now begun to fear that this miracle-working on the part of the French might increase their influence with the population too

greatly. But the water was eventually struck—a very large spring. When the flag announcing the fact was hoisted all the population of the oasis came running to the place. They decorated the machinery with palm leaves, obtained cups and drank the water, embraced each other, shouting with enthusiasm. A goat was sacrificed, and the day terminated with music and dancing, and even the marabouts looked pleased.

Since that time the French have sunk innumerable artesian wells, with the result that the date industry flourishes, the population of the Sahara, at least of the part nearer Algiers, has become more settled, and rapine and plunder are no longer numbered among the means of livelihood there.

But water, too much of it, can be a curse rather than a blessing. Nowadays in the oases, in April and again in the autumn, the Oukhem fever breaks out in its most virulent form. As soon as the irrigating ditches get a red scum on their surface all who can get away from the Sahara oasis. They know that in a short time the mosquitoes which carry the disease will hatch out. Some of these dwellers in the oases look poor creatures. They talk a good deal about fever, but I may say that I personally have during my wanderings about the Desert only met one bad case of fever, and have seen few mosquitoes. Perhaps I happened to be there at the wrong time of the year.

These oases are beautiful places, and, as the traveller to Biskra knows, are rendered more beautiful still by the Desert being next door to them. There is the river

oasis, of which accessible examples exist in El Kantara, Bous-saada, and many other towns, the well oasis, and yet again the cup oasis. The cup oasis is perhaps the most charming of any. These latter are really spots in the Desert where there is water below the soil in abundance, and which by care extending through centuries the inhabitants and their predecessors have prevented from being overwhelmed by the sand. This sand is heaped around the oasis to the height of the tops of the palms. Hence the name "cup" oasis. The fertility of the soil within such a cup is wonderful. The palms grow in a dense mass, and among them are fig, almond, peach and other trees. In such an oasis much more clearly than elsewhere can you gather what a great enemy the sand is to the Arab, and how he has to struggle constantly against its encroachments. And in the end, in spite of his struggle, it is the sand that always wins. That is, it always won until the French came to his assistance with modern methods for fighting the universal enemy.

But sand and water are not the oasis' only enemy. There is the locust. Locusts often visit the Sahara and die in thousands outside Biskra when starting to cross the mountains, falling on the bare stones and rock. Apparently they die from starvation. They can be seen coming in their myriads, and from afar have the appearance of a storm cloud. They even hide the sun.

I remember the sun being hidden once by a cloud of small flies on Lake Victoria. As we were returning

from our attack and capture of Bukoba a very dark mass arose and gradually crept up to our ship. I took a series of four photographs at intervals of a minute of the hospital ship accompanying us. At the end of five minutes the sun was blotted out and we were in complete darkness. A very strange thing happened just before the darkness came. A blinding flash of lightning lit the sky, it was followed instantly by a crash of thunder. When we finally got through this dense cloud of flies we found thousands of the little chaps had fallen on the deck.

Of course, the locust is quite a big fellow, and the noise of the millions of wings as a swarm flies is like the sound of the Victoria Falls in the distance. When a terrible army like this settles on the ground the branches of trees break with the weight, in a few hours all vegetation will be eaten or destroyed. When the army of locusts has eaten everything bare it gets into the air again and takes its departure, leaving the poor wretched Arabs in despair, with famine staring them in the face.

It was locusts that stopped the army of Charles XII. as it was retreating from Bessarabia on its defeat at Pultowa. They beat so violently against his army as it was passing through a defile that the king thought it was a hailstorm. The sun was hidden. The arrival of the locusts had been announced by a whistling sound like that which precedes a tempest, and the noise of their flight quite overpowered the noise made by the Black Sea. All the country round about was soon laid

waste on their route. During the same year a great part of Europe was invaded by these pests.

Locusts are very bad in South Africa, where I have seen them eat whole districts out of house and home. In Central Africa I have only seen a few locusts. On two occasions whilst I was there denizens of the animal world were responsible for stopping the train on the Uganda Railway. The humble caterpillar performed this almost impossible act. A huge army of him crossed the line and the wheels of the engine would not bite.

The negroes of the Sudan endeavour to frighten the locusts in their flights by savage yells. The monks of Europe in the old days used to exorcise them, catching a few and telling them that if they and their friends did not clear out they would all be excommunicated.

The Arabs also have an infallible means of ridding themselves of the locusts. Here is what General Daumas tells us on the subject :—

"According to Ben-Omar, the Prophet read one day on the wings of a locust written in Hebrew characters the words, 'We are the troops of the Most High God ; we each lay ninety-nine eggs. If we were to lay a hundred we should devastate the whole world.' Upon this Mahomet, greatly alarmed, made an ardent prayer in which he begged God to destroy these enemies of Mussulmans. In answer to this invocation, the Angel Gabriel told Mahomet that a part of his prayer should be granted. Since that epoch, indeed, words of invocation to the Prophet, written on a piece of paper and enclosed in a reed which is planted in the middle of a wheat field or orchard, have the power of turning away the locusts. This recipe is infallible, at least so say the devout Mussulmans."

There is some good about the locusts, however, according to the Arabs. When you see them in a dream they announce the future. If you dream that you are eating them it is a good omen. If you dream that it rains golden locusts God will restore to you that which you have lost, etc. The Arabs also believe that the human race will disappear from the earth after the extinction of the locusts, that these insects were formed from the rest of the clay out of which man had been formed, and that they were destined to serve him as food.

There are other pests which do a certain amount of damage to the palms. The spiked or palm lizard is one. But the Arab is constantly after him, and nowadays he is scarcely to be seen. Then there is the palm rat, a beautiful little animal with a coat something the colour of a badger's and with a bushy tail. He haunts the tops of the palms, and makes nests in which he stores sometimes as much as ten pounds of dates. Birds, too, prey on the dates, so much so that the Arabs have to cover up the clusters.

Of the date palm itself a few words may be said. It is a beautiful tree growing in favoured districts to a height of as much as 80 feet. It has been known and prized by man from the earliest times. The Babylonians cultivated it, and in their writings give instructions for its cultivation. The Arabs and other races are absolutely dependent on it in many places for actual sustenance.

It has a straight trunk, scarred all the way up

where leaves have once grown, and stiff but rather graceful foliage. The Arabs dry the dates and eat them without further preparation. Cakes made from pounded and pressed dates are consumed all over the Sahara. The trunk is used for making furniture, the leaves for thatch, fuel, etc., and their fibre for making ropes.

Very little work is required for the successful cultivation of the palm, provided the spot selected for its cultivation is a suitable one. As the Arabs say, " Put its feet in water and its head in hell."

Irrigation canals supply the water. Dams are used to direct the flow of water, and the trees are watered at regular hours. The Desert sun fulfils all requirements in the other direction. The palm being unisexual, each blossom has to be fertilised by hand, which is done by Arab experts, who climb the palms at the proper season of the year.

The best dates come from the Biskra district, where the water supply is plentiful and the fruit in consequence large and juicy. The plantations about Touggourt and that part of the Desert produce small dates which are hard to beat for sweetness. The conditions here are just what the date palm likes. It drinks up moisture quickly, but it cannot bear rain. Experiments have been made to settle the quantity of water a date palm requires. It was found in these experiments that watering should take place every few days, and each palm should be given about a pint a minute. If this allowance is cut down the crop of dates from the palms decreases at once.

October is the month of harvest, when the dates are gathered by hand, sorted, packed and dispatched. Then you see the great clusters of golden-brown dates hanging on orange-coloured stems on every palm, and the Arabs and negroes busily climbing the trees and cutting them down.

Chapter VIII

MORE ABOUT BISKRA

I

WE arrived on the outskirts of Biskra, and halted for a moment where some thirsty camels were busily filling up. The sight created a fellow-feeling in the breast of the weary fellow-traveller. A few minutes afterwards I was enjoying the hospitality of the Hotel du Sahara.

That evening whilst we were having dinner I heard a banging of drums and a good deal of shouting. On looking out I saw a horrible negro dressed up in fantastic clothes. He was in the act of showing his teeth and a very large tongue, and generally making a fool of himself. Two or three Arabs were with him, one of them carrying a modern Oxford Street lit-up advertisement on his shoulders, an advertisement which announced the fact that some wonderful Arab dances would take place that night at the Casino. For the benefit of those who may visit the country may I say here that I should not advise anyone to believe all the statements contained in such advertisements. As a rule the shows boosted are poor.

When I was about to visit the Sahara on the first

occasion I happened to see in a London illustrated publication a photograph of a lion standing in the Desert near what appeared to be the stump of a dead tree. The subjacent paragraph lauded the nerve of the man who came suddenly upon the fierce beast and, producing his camera, took the picture.

On the voyage out I dreamt at night that I also would do a similar doughty deed. By day I hoped ditto. And directly I arrived in Biskra I started making inquiries, and got to know one of the chief camera artists there, that wonderful and most artistic photographer the late Emile Fréchon. The amusing part of our meeting was that he would not believe that I was Cherry Kearton. He thought from the work I had done that I must be quite an old man.

As soon as possible during our conversation I brought out the picture of the lion in the Desert, and inquired if I should be able to get a chance to do something like that. After Fréchon had looked at it and read what was said underneath he burst out laughing.

"Why, that picture was taken by the most nervous man in all Algeria," he said. "The lion is blind. When you go farther south you will be able to see him and photograph him and, further, if there is anything the matter with you, on payment of twopence you may touch him, and then you get cured."

As my journey took me in an opposite direction, or rather at right angles to the lion's abode, I never

saw him. Neither did I find any of the lions I was told were living in the hills beyond Biskra at that time.

On my present visit I have already inquired after the old lion whose body had such curative properties . . . They have told me that he is dead, and that the two Arabs who owned him have retired on the fortunes they have made by allowing sick people to touch him at twopence a time.

Sometimes lions, they have told me further, are heard of near the Desert. But the beasts are getting very scarce, due, I take it, to the fact that the game has disappeared. The few animals that are hunted now have to be shot at at something like four hundred yards' distance. Panthers are also very scarce now. I was told a rather amusing story here about one which had been manufactured near the Desert for moving picture purposes. This consisted of a collie dog with a mask on. The difficulty had been to make a good tail. This was got over by putting a piece of wire down the tail with a little weight at the end to keep it down. The public who saw the picture never guessed the fraud.

At the Sahara Hotel I came into contact with what might easily be woven into the plot for a romance of the Desert. This was the strange affection of a young European woman, who shunned European society, for an elderly Arab whom she said she looked upon as a father. This man had lost his only son in the Great War, and her explanation to me was that she

had taken the son's place. She told me the following story about her adopted father.

They were out on an expedition in the Desert, and the old Arab, during the heat of the day was having a quiet siesta, lying on his side with his head resting on his left arm. Awakening, he opened his eyes. In front of them not twelve inches away was coiled up a horned viper, lying on his burnous, also asleep. Those who know anything of this deadly reptile can imagine what this man's feelings were. Fortunately, on awakening he had not moved. And he did not move now, but kept his terror-stricken eyes on the snake, knowing that the least movement might mean death.

Hurriedly pondering his dreadful situation, he decided to attempt to grasp and draw his dagger-like knife. Very slowly he moved his hand downwards. To him it seemed like hours before it gripped the dagger's hilt. Carefully drawing the knife out and bringing his arm to the position where he could effectively use his weapon, with one lightning sweep he cut through the entire body of the snake and then severed it into several portions, thus rendering it harmless. Incidentally he damaged in the operation the very good burnous on which the snake was lying.

Whilst I was in what is left of Biskra's old Arab quarter, trying to get a few "studies," I used to see this Arab standing at a distance looking in silent admiration at the lady who had adopted him as she

put on to canvas by means of her brush and paint scenes of Arab life.

The old Arab villages have gateways at each end which are supposed to be closed at midnight. The roads are very narrow, and generally on one side of them is a wide gutter, which at certain times of the day is filled with water. The roads run sometimes straight, more often crooked through the town, for the mud houses have been erected just where their owners listed, windowless houses, low, flat-topped, built of sun-dried bricks made from mud and straw. Near them, often in them, stand palms carefully tended, their foliage stiff, ragged and stained with the sun, their trunks straight and very rough, rising grandly towards the intensely blue Desert sky.

During the midday hours in some of these Desert villages all is quiet. At such times the visitor passing along the rough streets may catch some strains of a plaintive song, sung in a woman's high-pitched, droning voice, or a low-voiced murmur from an open door. But such sounds are infrequent. The inhabitants of the houses are taking their siesta. The bustling clatter of the morning, the chatter of the weavers at work, the sing-song voices of the school-children, the pounding noises of the kous-kous makers at work, all are stilled for the time being.

Presently these sounds will assert themselves again in the hot, dry, oppressive atmosphere. The daily round, the common task! No people I have come across yet are exempt from it. And these Arabs in

the barren parts of the great continent of Africa have indeed a harder struggle to make ends meet than their confrères in more favoured localities.

I am afraid that it is the women who have to bear the brunt of such hardships, and that their lot in life is one that would be intolerable to their white sisters in England, at least to those above the lowest classes. From the time they start pounding the kous-kous in the morning until it is time to go to bed they are hard at work. But as I said before, the average Arab woman is happy. She knows of nothing better than the life she leads. "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

But, I am told she resents, bitterly resents, the fact that, having become old and lost her charm, she has to permit her husband to take another and younger wife. And now to her aid for what it is worth comes the sermon on resignation given her in the Holy Book by the Prophet. Men, he has said in effect, are gods. Women are merely women. Let them be patient. It is their duty to submit. In fact, it is for this purpose that they have been created by Allah. The old wife bows her head. The new wife comes in. Picture the scenes that occur in some of those flat-topped, windowless houses, standing grim in the villages in the silence of the sands. Who knows what heart-breaking misery, jealousy, torture, exists in the bosoms of those who are immured within those solid walls of mud, what revilings they have to put up with, what pain they suffer?

But the casual passer-by sees nothing in the village

Arab children in old Biskra.

Facing page 214.

but a windowless house, a mud hut or two, a few date palms, a camel, a donkey, some straggling trees, a blind Arab and a dirty urchin or so.

On the other hand, one can see in some of the larger of these Desert villages wonderful old mosques, water fountains, gardens with orange trees and date palms. In the Kaid's garden at Sidi Okba one sees, for instance, palms, pomegranates, sweet lemons, figs, not to mention turtle doves, flourishing side by side.

The thing most out of place in the Desert is the European. White men and women perched on ungainly camels look thoroughly out of place in this setting.

I have spent many interesting hours in these villages watching the drama of life from the beginning to the end, and observing the many happy and other phases of it. In one part of an old town I have met children dressed in beautiful colours, tinsel and jewellery, going out to some fête or other. On the same day I have observed those taking part in a betrothal or about to take part in a marriage ceremony. Later in the day I have seen the dead being carried to the cemetery close by.

An Arab funeral, as I have said elsewhere, is a very simple affair. As a rule the corpse is put in its last resting-place within twenty-four hours of death.

The Arab has much respect for the dead, and on Friday especially, if you look at the cemetery, you will see women-folk visiting the graves. They spend much time there. But in spite of that, an Arab cemetery wears usually a neglected look. Most Arabs, indeed, think

that these cemeteries ought to be uncared for. They base the notion on something the Prophet is reported to have said. On each grave you will probably find small mounds, one, two or three. These tell the Arab whether child, man or woman sleeps there.

It is in this graveyard I was told that my old Arab guide was buried. I had to be satisfied, however, with the mere statement that he was there, for I never found his grave. I remember him as a good companion, a keen naturalist, whom I had spent many happy hours with, watching or catching horned vipers, lizards, jerboas, rats, and beetles.

So much has been written about Biskra by abler pens than mine that I feel it unnecessary to enlarge on many of the subjects I have touched on. The old negro village there has entirely disappeared, and a modern one has sprung up in its place with high mud houses. But you can still witness the queer sight of a negro girl riding into her mud house on a donkey within a hundred yards of one of the finest modern up-to-date hotels. On turning the corner in this negro quarter I came across another of the inmates taking his midday nap on the pathway, and promptly snapped him, all unconscious. Just past the hotel a tent was standing. The floor of the tent was covered with a highly-coloured carpet, whilst in the entrance stood a young tame gazelle and a lamb. These animals I often saw amusing themselves by running races together. Of course, the gazelle was the fleeter. Their antics entertained me vastly.

In the old Arab Quarter, Biskra. Facing page 216.

Standing at the back of the tent above-mentioned was a low square white-washed building, with a very large-type advertisement right across the front of it, running as follows :—

" Caravan Outfitters, Buffalo and Gazelle Hunting Arranged. In the Desert."

At first I did not quite gather the meaning, and wondered where the dickens the buffaloes lived in the Sahara Desert, when it suddenly occurred to me that by " buffalo " they possibly meant " moufflon."

Gazelle and moufflon are, as stated above, now the principal big game of the Desert. At a friend's house in England recently I saw a pair of heads, a male and a female moufflon, shot in the days of the late Lord Walsingham, who made the Desert his home with my friend for months at a time. The male moufflon has a long beard and horns longer and wider than a sheep. I should describe him almost as a sheep-goat.

Near the tent sat an Arab about thirty-five years of age, well dressed, with a dark beard. The little patch of sand in front of him with a mark of the triangle on it told me that he was a Sand Diviner. I got into conversation with him, and he produced a little bag out of which he brought quite a large scorpion. This Arab could do extraordinary things with the scorpion. I was interested, so he gave me an exhibition of his powers, and showed me—I had to believe my eyes—that he could put the scorpion just as much under control as one can a fowl. If you stroke a fowl's eyes and put its head under its wing, then swing it up

and down once or twice, it will lie perfectly still, as if hypnotised.

This scorpion appeared very lively when the Arab took it out of the bag, but with a few strokes and passes over it with a light touch or so a change came over it, and it lay perfectly still in the Arab's hand. The Arab then suggested that such was his control of the scorpion that he could place it on the back of my hand and it would lie still there. Having seen the agony that men suffered who had been stung by a scorpion, I felt a bit dubious. However, I plucked up enough courage to let him try. To my surprise it lay perfectly still and never moved in the slightest. How long it would have lain still I don't know, but having satisfied myself that the man spoke the truth, I told him it was time he took it off me, which he did. When he gave it another stroke or two backwards and forwards it became perfectly lively again. Around Biskra, I was told, they experience some difficulty in keeping cattle on account of the prevalence of the horned viper and scorpion.

As I wandered down one of the side streets in Biskra I went past the native barracks, which faced a large parade ground. Walls some ten feet high ran round this ground. Along these walls were painted huge maps in red and black, teaching the soldiers and natives that the French Empire had over one thousand million inhabitants, and therefore France was the greatest country on earth.

During the war Jews swarmed into the Sahara

Mesmerizing a scorpion.

Facing page 218.

with a view to making hay while the sun shone, that is, while the French were away fighting. The Arab often sells his crop of dates long before it is ripe, and, from the information I have, I think some big fortunes were made by the Jews then. Camels, too, were sold in great numbers for service in Egypt, and as a result there are not so many in the Sahara now.

Every hotel in Biskra has its own guide or guides. Arabs of various ages pester the poor traveller directly he puts in an appearance at the station. These Arabs wish either to become your guide or to sell you something or other.

They have very sharp eyes, have the Arabs, eyes which are invariably brown. Within an hour of your arrival at Biskra every Arab in the place seems to know where you are staying and all about you.

The Arab boy is very quick to see a joke, and loves a little humour. I used to win their admiration by doing conjuring tricks. Any conjuring trick, especially if money is conjured with, has a magnetic attraction for them. Crowds used to follow me everywhere I went. As I am a good-tempered individual their attention never worried me. One boy, a very ugly urchin, poorly fed and badly clothed, in fact with only a few tattered remnants of clothing hung about him, greeted me every morning, no matter how early I emerged from the hotel, with :

"You my camarade—eh, mister? Black your boots—yes!"

He used to say this with a peculiar leer in his eye,

and I would at once solemnly offer to black *his* boots, as mine were quite clean and his were not. I don't think they had had the dirt brushed off them for years.

One evening I saw him looking longingly into a baker's shop. He caught sight of me as I was passing him, and held out his hand to shake mine. Arabs love shaking hands. It does not matter who the person is, an Arab will shake hands with him on every occasion, even if he meets him twenty times a day.

The boy told me he had had a bad day, and had only made a few sous. I took him inside the shop and bought him a long roll of bread. As we came out he said :

"I 'm off to my grandmother."

And down the street clitter clatter, rags, boot-blacking box, and bread went. Next morning he told me that he and his grandmother had had a great feast. They lived together alone.

He was a good little fellow, that Arab boot-black, but if the story I was told in the Desert is true, or substantially true, there are Arab boys in Biskra who are not good at all. The story runs as follows :—

Now it happened on a day that three little Biskra donkeys died, and they went to the place appointed for them, a kind of purgatory arranged by Allah for women, donkeys and all other animals. And there in the furnace, as it was called, they passed many years. At the proper time Mohammed sent a guide to them, to show them the way up to the door leading from out of

The three donkeys of Biskra.

Facing page 220.

the furnace. And when they went out by the door they saw another door opposite over which was written DJAMAA, that is to say, mosque or school.

This is the place where all good Arabs go when they die, and where also go all the little Biskra boys who die, that is, of course, those that have been good. The guide opened the door of the DJAMAA and the donkeys looked into the courtyard, and there they saw all the little boys playing. And the leading donkey turned to the others and said: "My brothers, there are the little Biskra boys whom we used to know on earth." And they answered, "It is so, my brother." And the first donkey said, "There are they who beat us heavily with sticks." "It is so, my brother." "And who used to pile heavy faggots of wood on our backs, and sacks of grain, and of dates, till we could scarce walk, small as we were." "It is so, my brother. "And not content with that, they used then themselves to get on our backs to make the load heavier." And the donkeys answered, "It is so, my brother." Then turned the first donkey to the guide and, still standing before the open door of the DJAMAA, "If," said he, "if it be the Will of Allah, we would rather go back to the furnace."

The Arab is a great gambler. He starts early in life, decidedly earlier than does the average Englishman. But the English sometimes start early enough in all conscience. The other day I was in St. John's Wood standing in the street waiting for a friend. A little boy was going along by me carrying an evening paper, when three other boys, one about twelve and the

other two about nine, stopped him. The big boy said:

"Here, let's have a look at your paper. Come on."

And then, as the little fellow didn't seem anxious to part:

"I want to know what's won."

To my amazement those three boys stood by me and discussed the doings of the horses of the day.

The Arab is allowed by law to gamble. He gambles openly, and many are the ways in which he tries his fortume. Up-to-date methods of gambling have been introduced into Algeria. I took a picture of Arab boys grouped around a crudely-made wheel, something like the wheels to be seen at Wembley at the present time. These boys seemed to be rather suspicious of that wheel.

In another corner of the old Market Square in the shadow of a tin shed a three-card-trick man plied his trade, and many were the unsuspecting Arabs he victimised. I spent one entire day chasing this crafty gentleman round the market. He had his spies out just as street bookies have their spies stationed about them in places like Soho. I never got within twenty yards of him before he made off and mixed with the crowd. He was worse to stalk than a moufflon.

On my first visit I used to go to this Market Place —it was then entirely open, no tin sheds disfigured its appearance— and squat on a mat beside my Arab

Young gamblers.

Facing page 222.

friends and play them for cups of coffee. I used to like playing dominoes. But my Arab friends usually preferred draughts. When playing draughts with them I invariably soon found myself losing. My opponent would sacrifice his men to make a king. And the power of that king in the hands of an Arab was wonderful. He would jump from one side of the board to the other, taking every piece I had left in no time. And I paid for the coffee.

However, that coffee always made up for the loser's disappointment. I have never tasted coffee to equal it. In making it they boil it with the grounds and add sugar. Consequently it is rather thick and very sweet.

The Arab has also a great fondness for cigarettes and many other things as well as gambling and coffee. But there is one thing he has no appreciation of, that is punctuality. And no matter where he is, and no matter what the time of day, when he thinks he ought to pray, well—he drops down and starts.

On my expeditions in Central Africa before the War I used to show my black servant and his comrades London illustrated papers with pictures of aeroplanes, and explain to them that we could fly like vultures. They refused at first to believe me. In fact, they did not believe me till the war came and we were encamped near Kilimanjaro. Then aeroplanes arrived at the camp, and they actually saw them fly. Wasn't my servant excited then! Two of my old porters who also happened to be doing duty at the

camp rushed up to tell me the news. They referred to the illustrated papers and stated that I had spoken the truth. When they had got over their astonishment I was rather taken aback by a question asked me by my old camera man, who had followed them into the tent. He inquired:

"Is that the thing that carries the mails to God?"

When flying was taking place natives always lay flat on the ground with one eye on the machine in the air, as if they did not want it to see them. They used to call the bombing machine "The bird that laid the bad egg." Further, when they went over to the place where the bad egg had dropped and inspected the damage done, they would shake their heads and say, "This is no good."

I saw no such surprise exhibited in the Desert when the aeroplane came over looking for the ill-fated Dixmude. The Arab, though excitable enough, prides himself on being a stolid individual, and it takes a great deal to make him exhibit surprise.

A train is another thing that looks incongruous in the Desert. As I was coming into Biskra one evening from Tolga with the intention of getting on the well-known rock there in order to watch the sunset, I was just in time to get a snapshot of the train as it thundered by.

Quite a number of visitors were on the rock that evening when I arrived. I was much interested to see with what appreciation the majority looked on this marvellous sunset vouchsafed us. What sunsets

we see at Biskra! Their ever-changing form and colour I find difficult to describe. No two are alike. I give here a photograph of one. If only the camera could have reproduced it in all its glory of colour! But neither camera nor pen can ever in my opinion really describe a Sahara sunset. It comes quickly, making a glory of the sky. Then as quickly fades.

There is one sunset I remember watching as I sat on this rock that I will court failure by attempting to describe. Just below me a couple of hawks were hunting diligently; several times they grounded, but without apparently obtaining any food; their plumage shone in the light. Just beyond was a nomad's tent. At the back of me were the Aurés Mountains. Every evening when the sun reaches a certain point in its descent of the sky these mountains take on an extraordinary and magnificent bright golden, reddish hue. It is because of that that the Arabs call them Jebel Achmar Kahaddon, which means "Mountains of the Red Cheeks." I think sunset at Biskra with these mountains shining is one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen in my life. That evening they were at their best. Turning, I beheld the most extraordinary changes of colour in the sky as the sun sank. The clouds, the rocky peaks of the distant hills, the sky itself shone with unearthly beauty. The Desert glowed. That sunset will remain in my memory.

The evenings are rather treacherous here, and the visitor if he wishes to avoid chills should wrap up well at sunset. This part of Algeria is not perhaps suited

for invalids, owing to the rapid changes of temperature. But Biskra has this advantage from the invalid's point of view, it is built on flat ground.

The handsome monument was erected to Cardinal Lavigerie of Northern Africa. At the time of the great famine, in the seventies, the Arabs between Oran and Algiers had no food for their children. They either sold or deserted them. Cardinal Lavigerie was the means of these children being fed. He took charge of orphans and had them brought up in the Christian Faith. At the foot of the monument Arabs can be seen gambling and gossiping, two of their greatest pleasures.

Outside Biskra many of the nomads or Bedouins I have mentioned before still live in their tents during part of the year. They also for a while till a little patch of Desert, sow and reap a crop, and then migrate. The dogs these nomads keep are exceedingly savage and treacherous. It is dangerous sometimes to go near the tents. I asked an Arab why the nomads kept the dogs.

"To keep off robbers," he said, "and to give warning that robbers are near."

"But the Bedouins are poor people," I rejoined. "Why should robbers trouble with them?"

"To guard their flocks," he replied.

"But they 've only got about three goats altogether," I pointed out.

This nonplussed the Arab for a moment. Then he suggested that the robbers might steal the Bedouins' wives.

People here assure me that they have seen snipe, sandpiper, and wild duck among the palms of Biskra.

Jackals used to be fairly numerous around Biskra. You could hear them barking or howling quite near the town every night. I should have expected to have found hyena in the district too. It is not too far north. But I have seen never one, nor have I come across any records of this loathsome-looking beast having been known to visit the place. Where the jackal is, in Central Africa at any rate, there you find the hyena. The one discovers the kill almost as soon as the other.

During this present visit I have only heard the jackal twice, but the barking of dogs I heard nearly every night, which would be evidence of the presence of these night visitors.

The nights at Biskra are enlivened by many forms of entertainment. In many places dancing is to be seen, in another an extremely poor cinematograph show. In yet another place a sword exhibition. The man who gives this transfers his sword to either hand, keeps two men engaged and eventually disarms them. He is one of the characters of Biskra, and bears the nickname "Bonaparte." Bonaparte was a great pal of mine. On several occasions he would stroll up to where I was having coffee with a friend in the evening and ask me to do some of my conjuring tricks. He was utterly fascinated by the tricks, and before he went off to his performance in one of the cafés he would look at my friend, pointing at me, and say, "Ah, diable!"

I think the dervish performance is by far the best

of all the shows in Biskra, although it is somewhat gruesome. These people have a sort of chief with them, and all those taking part in the performance, whether it be burning themselves by fire or putting needles through their cheeks and throat, first of all kneel down at the feet of this man. Then a bright silken cloth is thrown over them and all their heads are put under it. Whatever the dope administered, it undoubtedly sends these men into a curious hypnotic frenzy. Although I have seen the performance many times, years ago and recently, I have never seen any blood shed.

These dervishes, as I have called them, belong to a queer brotherhood found in all the towns of Northern Africa, and are called the Aissaoua, which literally translated means the guild of Jesus. Tradition says that the founder was a marabout or holy man whose preaching attracted multitudes. On one occasion in the Desert he with his followers ran short of food. He told them not to lose heart, but to eat what they could find. So they ate leaves, beetles, snakes, even scorpions. Since that time members of the guild have had the power of digesting anything.

In point of fact the original members of the brotherhood were most probably descended from the Psylii, a tribe of serpent charmers mentioned by Herodotus as having perished in the Sahara.

These people are really professional exorcists. If a man is possessed by a devil or djinn, they will come along and for a consideration cast the djinn out.

A dervish dancer.

(with three needles through his cheek and throat.)

Facing page 228.

They begin their performances as a rule with the beating of a drum or tambourine and the chanting a low chant to its accompaniment, gradually work themselves up into a frenzy. Then one of them begins to jump about. The head of the party makes magnetic passes over the jumper, who by this time is so mad with excitement that he will torture himself without apparently feeling any pain.

He will burn himself with a hot iron, he will eat portions of prickly pear leaf. He will even—this has been witnessed by Europeans on many occasions—take a skewer and force out his eye, twisting his eyelid round the end of the skewer. Afterwards he nonchalantly returns the eye to its socket.

Many of these performers are negroes. As is well known, a negro feels pain much less than does a white man, his nervous system being not nearly so sensitive. But how even a negro can endure the torture that these Aissaoua inflict on themselves is still a puzzle to the visitor.

They still eat snakes and scorpions, do these extraordinary people, dance on knives, and put skewers through their cheeks.

But it is to be noted that before the actual performance begins the performers always inhale some sort of incense given them by their chief.

Originally these Aissaoua were not public performers. They made money by touring the country casting out devils. Even to-day the people in the country districts of Algeria thoroughly believe in their magical powers.

On several occasions I went in the evening to see children of the poor fed in the middle of the tin shanties in the old Market Square. These children owe their meal per day, which consists of beans cooked in a kind of brown stock and served out in portions in small bowls, to a friend of mine, Mr. W. H. Edgar, a man who knows more about Northern Africa than anyone I have ever met. It was quite a pleasure to see how well behaved they were, although desperately hungry, the poor things.

II

I had the pleasure of being received in Biskra by the Bach Aghar.

Bach Aghar means "Chief of all the Arabs over a Vast Territory." The present holder of the title belongs to the Gana family, who have always been noted for their loyalty to the French, and who are now very wealthy.

As I walked up the avenue of trees to the house I noticed a tame pet gazelle, and wondered if the Bach Aghar was keen on natural history. I was shown into a large room with divans on two sides of the wall, these being covered by costly rugs. Rugs also were strewn on the floor. The walls themselves were hung with weapons and the trophies of the chase. Here was European luxury indeed. But the impression left on my mind was of manly simplicity and a civilisation different from ours. Such objects as there were in the

Arab school in the Desert.

Dervish fire dance.

Facing page 230.

room were of delicate Eastern workmanship, and I should say of considerable value.

I was standing admiring some wonderful old swords and guns that hung on the wall when I heard the swish of a flowing garment.

Turning, I beheld my host, the Bach Aghar. The impression he made on me remains vivid. I saw a tall, stately, dark-bearded man, light-complexioned, and with carefully-manicured hands. I noticed the magnificent material of the robe he wore, noticed too on his breast medals and decorations.

He held out his hand to me with a welcoming smile. I noticed on it a beautiful diamond cluster ring as well as another of antique design. In a soft, velvety voice he begged me to be seated, and expressed the pleasure my visit to his poor house was affording him. I answered him in kind.

We talked on. I, of course, was anxious to glean information about my host's past life. He wanted obviously to draw me out on my own subject, natural history. He began to ask me about lions. I smiled. Strange as it may seem, the word "lion" is magic in every circle where people are keen on animals.

We sat chatting for about twenty minutes. Hard as I tried not to talk shop, somehow in our conversation we always returned to the subject of big game hunting. The Bach Aghar must be a great diplomatist. I was a child in his hands. He was deeply interested, as most leaders of men are, in other parts of the world, and I heard would listen for hours to hear all about big game

and big game adventures. He certainly was a hunter at heart.

Coffee was brought in by two small Arabs. My host poured the coffee out and handed it to me. The beautiful china the cups were made of and their unusual shape struck me. Each cup consisted of a small handleless cup inside another of the shape of an egg cup. I ventured to express my admiration of them. The Bach Aghar said they had been in his family for over two hundred years.

Later we talked on the subject of hawking. My host said that his cousin had the most wonderfully-trained falcons in Algeria, and that he kept a special establishment for them some fifty miles away from Biskra ; and when he bade me farewell he said he would write and arrange with his cousin to give me a demonstration of hawking in the Desert.

Before going back to my hotel I took advantage of the permission accorded to me, and wandered through the Bach Aghar's garden of date palms, flowers, and beautiful tropical plants.

The system of irrigation there is admirable. Water is allowed to fill up the hollows at the foot of the date palms at given times, so that the roots are never short of moisture.

On this day all these hollows were full, and I beheld the most wonderful reflections, one of which I reproduce on the opposite page.

Chatting with one of the old Arab gardeners, he told me that they did not get any direct payment for

In the Bach Aghar's garden.. Facing page 232.

their work, but that the owner of the garden, the Bach Aghar, paid all expenses for material used, and after his household was supplied his, the gardener's, income was derived from the sale of the surplus vegetables, fruit, etc.

A few days later I had the pleasure of meeting the Kaid, Ali Ben Gana, the Bach Aghar's cousin, and he very kindly told me that he had arranged, as the Bach Aghar had promised he would, to give me a chance of seeing what hawking in the Desert was like.

On the eventful day I arrived first at the appointed meeting-place. Within a few minutes I saw the hawking party coming along. The Kaid arrived first. His appearance was so magnificent that I cannot refrain from an attempt at describing it. He wore a rich dress of a dark blue colour, and a blue hood relieved with red and white. On his breast were pinned decorations and medals won in the War. The horse he rode was one of the finest specimens of the Arab horse I have ever seen. It pranced along with a grace and elasticity charming to the eye. The equipment of the horse was magnificent. Its very stirrups had the appearance of gold. And what a beautiful animal the Arab horse is! I marvel at the perfection the breed has been brought to, and often wonder to myself how it has come to pass. There are, according to the tales of travellers, butterflies in the Arctic regions. One naturally wonders what business butterflies have there. So I have often muttered when watching a beautiful

horse floundering in the Desert: "What business have you to be here, you lovely creature?"

The Kaid accomplished his approach to where I stood almost sideways, the horse prancing as he came. Both horse and man looked as if they were made for each other. The Kaid sat like a statue. No matter how they moved both looked as if they were part of one single body. I have only met one other man who could ride a horse like the Kaid, Ali Ben Gana, and that was my late colonel, Colonel Driscoll, famous in various African wars.

A few minutes after the Kaid's arrival the old falconer came along with the falcons. The birds were quite docile. They were wonderfully trained and wonderfully well handled. They were, I saw at once, of the breed of the Barbary falcon, which I had seen in the mountains. On inquiry the Kaid told me that it was in these mountains that his men got falcons to replenish his supply. A leather glove was handed the horseman and then a falcon. It was a pretty sight to see him prancing forward with the bird on his wrist. The falcon seemed to know all about what was in the wind.

Suddenly the rider spurred his horse into a gallop. The falcon was released. Quickly he discovered his prey. A swoop, a scream, and all was over.

As I had never seen such an event exhibited on a moving picture, I took the opportunity to make a picture record of it, because the sport of hawking is no longer as fashionable in Algeria as it was, and

Hawking in the Desert.

Facing page 234.

will, I think, die out there eventually, just as it has done in our country.

I am told that when he lets the hawk slip the hunter ejaculates, "In the name of Allah." If he omits this formula the game seized by the falcon is not lawful food.

These same words are pronounced by Mohammedans everywhere over all animals killed for food.

The hares on the Desert, which are the game chiefly hunted in falconry, are small and of a lightish colour. Their colouring, lighter than that of our own hare, is possibly protective. They harmonise well with the sand and withered scrub.

During the progress of the hunt silence was observed. The huntsmen, old retainers of the Kaid, worked like clockwork. One thing that struck me as remarkable was the resemblance of the old falconer's face to that of the falcon he was holding. I think the reader who looks carefully at the illustration on the next page will observe a striking likeness. People —I am not the only one to have observed it—often grow like their pets, just as a man and a woman very much in love begin after a long while to resemble each other.

I was further impressed by the obvious affection existing between the Kaid and his followers. Whether in sport, in public, social or domestic life, the Arab of quality and his retainers treat each other as loyal men should. And whilst there is never any familiarity between them, each can be certain of the other's help in a crisis, and of consideration at all times.

On several occasions on both my visits I have been lucky enough to see several of the Desert hares at close quarters. Those that I saw were not much bigger than our English rabbit, and, I think, somewhat lighter in colouring. It may have been fancy, but I thought they were darker on one sort of ground than another. I am speaking of the hares I saw in the dwarf bush as compared with those in the fairly open Desert. As I had no means of catching them, I was not able to verify my observations, but I think it quite likely from what I know of Nature that this colour would vary with their environment.

As a boy I knew two different streams in a Yorkshire dale, one with dark moss growing on all the stones in the rivulet, and the fish in that were quite dark as compared with the fish in another stream on the other side of one of our fields not two hundred yards away, with a bright sandy river-bed. These two streams joined quite nearby. I remember as a boy going to the junction and chasing fish down one stream and up the other, when they absolutely changed to the colour of their surroundings, and I had great difficulty in seeing them. I have seen a herd of zebra in a certain light alter colour in much the same way. Although the ground was quite bare, they were difficult to see. This applies to lions and many other animals as well.

The old falconer and the falcons.

Facing page 236.

Chapter IX

AROUND TOUGGOURT

BEFORE leaving Biskra I revisited the small sand dunes about four miles from the town, wishing to get a little information about them for the benefit of those who may visit the country.

They are disappointing sand hills, especially to one who has seen those farther south. I saw little owls here, tiny fellows almost the colour of the sand. I found a lovely little rat with soft eyes and long whiskers, caught him and put him in the breast-pocket of my tunic. He lived with me for some weeks, and bade fair to equal as a companion the little long-whiskered fellow I have already mentioned. But on one cold night death claimed him.

When I was sitting on the sands among the dunes having my luncheon I noticed a large black beetle near me. Quite a cunning fellow this beetle proved to be. He would come walking along followed by others, and, travelling at a great pace, would make straight for me. On my throwing him and his friends some small pieces of bread the whole party would scramble for them, and a pretty fight they would have with each other. Whether they went by smell or by sight I do not know, but quite a number would turn up when

there was any bread going. I touched one or two of them lightly with my stick to see what would happen. With astonishing quickness they buried their heads in the sand, leaving their little bodies sticking up perpendicular in the air, and so remained for about thirty seconds.

South of these dunes used to be one of my happy hunting-grounds for jerboas during my first visit. I took two home with me, and kept them in England for quite a time.

On returning to Biskra from this trip to the dunes I again went to look at the sunset. Somebody touched me on the shoulder. I turned, to be greeted by an old Central African friend of mine, whom I had seen last near Uganda, Doctor Ridsdale, a man who like myself is a lover of jungle and desert.

The French Government have very kindly provided a nice little railway to Touggourt. By a judicious use of it the visitor to these parts of Algeria can see some really fine bits of the Desert without any effort on his or her part. I certainly appreciate this mode of transit more than that of riding a camel, as I did on my former Desert wanderings. The older one gets, I find, the less one likes camel riding. I can remember the time when the sand dunes near Biskra were all of the Desert the visitor ever saw. Now he can go by rail, and if he encounters a little sandstorm on the way, as I did, he won't be any the worse for the experience.

But the railway has made a vast difference to

Touggourt. I noticed that directly I arrived there. It bids fair to become another Biskra.

Up-to-date hotels have been erected, new buildings in plenty to interest the traveller. The inhabitants, I found, were much the same as ever. They still hang skulls on their date trees to keep the birds off. But are the skulls to keep the birds off? I am informed they are. But some people say that they are put there for luck!

Although right in the Desert, there is plenty of water at Touggourt. The French Government has done a great deal here as at other places in the Sahara in the way of sinking wells. Often during this work when a subterranean passage has been struck and the water has rushed earthwards blind fish have appeared on the surface. After a few weeks in the light these fish lose the skin over the eye, and are able to see just like any other fish.

The only other place in Africa at which, so far as I have heard, blind fish have been found was at the Magadi soda lake in Kenya Colony. These were found by my old friend Dick Cunningham (one of the best naturalist hunters of East Africa).

At Touggourt there are some quite large lakes, "shotts" as they are called, which all sorts of birds visit. Wild geese, duck, snipe, dunlin, sandpipers, green sandpipers, red shanks make their home at these lakes. A host of others call a halt here also while migrating north. I tried very hard to obtain some nature studies here, but the birds are far too wary. The lakes are handy

for sportsmen, and during my visit there were several Europeans out shooting on them.

I have seen it stated by early writers that the open salt lakes at Touggourt were swarming in their day with duck and snipe, that plover were in abundance, and that the lakes were a headquarters for rare English members of the duck tribe, such as the white-eyed, red-crested, tufted ducks and the widgeon. I paid my first visit there at the beginning of April, and on this occasion I was at the lakes at the beginning of January. On neither visit have I seen anything like the number of species mentioned. Perhaps the shooting has driven them away.

Coming into Touggourt from the south for the first time as night was falling, you might easily be forgiven for imagining that there had been a slight fall of snow during the day. The ground is covered with a thin crust of salt.

On market day, which occurs every Thursday, Touggourt market-place simply swarms with Arabs, who appear from nowhere ; and you may see many live animals for sale. I watched Arab merchants examining sheep in this market with a view to buying. It reminded me of my visits to fairs in North Yorkshire in bygone days. These Arabs seemed to examine in the same critical way the sheep as the purchasers there did. It is mostly a poor class of Arab that frequents these markets.

It was here I saw two men dressed in Arab clothing whom I could have sworn were Europeans. Both had

At prayer near where the date trees are buried in the sand.

"The Thirteen Seats" at Touggourt. Facing page 240.

reddish hair and blue eyes with fair complexions. On my showing a keen interest in them they sheered off. It is not the first time I have seen the civilised article dressed in uncivilised garb. Of course, they may have been Kabyles. These people are often very fair.

A photograph of one of these poor Arabs of Touggourt I reproduce. It is that of a man who used to follow me round the place. I have christened him a "Derelict of the Desert," or the "Man with a Thousand Stitches."

Although poor in appearance, I must admit the majority, if not nearly all, the Touggourt Arabs seem well nourished. Plump and ragged they are now, plump and ragged they were on my first visit. But like the birds, Arabs vary in condition with the season of the year. In the summer those who have been thriftless when there were plenty of dates about have a very bad time, and starvation carries off many of the weaker.

I had the misfortune to lose the keys of my film box at Touggourt during this last visit of mine. The reader will be surprised, perhaps, when I say that the film in that box before being exposed costs me anything up to £150. Naturally I was anxious not to damage the lock. But how could I open the box without doing so? The manager of the hotel solved the problem. He suggested that he should send for a locksmith he knew of. Fancy! A locksmith at Touggourt is indeed civilisation! The locksmith arrived. He brought with him a large bundle of rusty keys. In size and shape most of them looked suitable for

opening the Tower of London or some equally ancient place. But my box, alas! was modern. The locksmith couldn't open it. After a great deal of struggling and sweating he said there was only one thing to do, and that was to cut the box open with a rough chisel. With an evil smile on his face he produced the chisel.

"No you don't!" I cried. "Let me have another try first."

I had another look at the box, pressed the lid and—Hey, presto!—to my astonishment it came open quite easily.

The locksmith grinned sheepishly. My reputation as a conjurer went up in Touggourt one hundred per cent. But I was secretly not so pleased. Had I tried before I might have done without the locksmith.

A similar thing happened many years ago to a friend of mine. He was going on a business trip to New York. It was the first time he had ever been away from England, and he had bought a magnificent leather trunk for the occasion. He arrived home in the evening to find the trunk there, tried to open it, but could not. As I was living close by he sent for me. When I arrived he almost had tears in his eyes.

"I have to start early to-morrow morning," he moaned, pointing to a string on the handle that went inside the trunk. "Look what the fools have done. They have locked the trunk with the keys inside. Now, this is a business."

The man with a thousand stitches.

Facing page 242.

Just then the village blacksmith, who had been sent for, arrived on the scene. Chuckling up my sleeve, I watched him solemnly examine the box.

"We shall have to cut it open," he pronounced at last. He had the same idea, you see, as the locksmith at Touggourt.

"Wait a minute," I said, waving him off the box.

I quietly pressed the brass work on one side in front of the patent lock, and the lid sprang open.

My friend collapsed in a chair. "Thank God!" he muttered.

The young manager of the hotel here was very obliging, and took a keen interest in photography. He had a subject which he wanted me to reproduce for him as his camera was too small. It consisted of a little ivory model of a woman holding up her sunshade, the work of a Japanese.

The story he gave me with reference to it was that it was brought by his fiancée from Japan for him. He always had it with him, and one day, whilst sitting at a broad desk that he had in the hall of the hotel, this little model was standing in front of him. Looking up at it from what he was doing, possibly thinking of the giver, it suddenly toppled over for no apparent reason, as there was no movement, and the base was quite solid. This naturally startled him. It had broken in its fall. He was very much upset. He felt for some mysterious reason certain something had happened in his life. The next day he had the sad news by wire

that his fiancée had died suddenly in Boulogne at the very time this incident took place. To me this story fitted in with the mysterious atmosphere of the Desert.

One of the funniest scenes I saw during this visit happened close to my Touggourt hotel. A dog, goat, and cockerel were the actors in it. The dog and goat started scrapping, because each wanted to be first for a drink of water. After the fight had been going on for about twenty seconds the cockerel joined in. The three went at it hammer and tongs for about a minute, when they each retired to their respective corners of the yard, having forgotten, I think, what the fight was about.

The railway does not go any farther than Touggourt. But a good substitute has been discovered for it, namely the Citroen car. This is the modern Ship of the Desert, and truly a wonderful machine. It has harnessed the Desert and robbed it of its terrors. Using a Citroen car, you can cross and recross the Sahara at will in the space of a few days.

In the arched recesses on one side of the square market-place at Touggourt I saw a good many Arabs working treadle sewing machines. There was a small quantity of fruit for sale. I noticed oranges, dates, onions, carrots and lemons. I saw farther along the line merchants buying and selling, and bartering grain for dates. Under a date palm an Arab was busy shaving the head and face of a customer. He used no lather, but shaved dry. Next to him sat

Two methods of travel in the Desert. Facing page 244.

a scribe laboriously writing letters in Arabic for his illiterate clients.

On the opposite side of the market is the public washhouse. This certainly was being well patronised. Strolling a little farther along the square I ran across a man under another palm selling coffee. Beside a patient-looking donkey stood a handsome boy. He was watching two fowls tied on the donkey's back. I saw blacksmiths busy making daggers with red leather sheaths for the visitors. An old man kept the fire going with bellows similar to that the natives use in Central Africa.

Touggourt is in my opinion one of the most interesting towns in this part of Africa. Nowhere have I seen scenes more characteristic of Arab life.

The history of the place before the French occupation is very nebulous. Arabs, of course, have their records, such as they are. But it may be questioned whether previous to the French advance any European traveller had ever visited the place. The Sahara about here was too dangerous a hundred years ago.

But the Romans certainly were in Touggourt during their occupation of Northern Africa, and many antiquarians hold the belief that these enterprising people were the founders of the town. They base this belief on the fact that the ancient Kasbah at Touggourt is built of that favourite Roman building material dressed stone, stone which must have been imported from far to the north as there are no quarries of any kind in the neighbournood.

However, so far as I am aware no buried coins, earthenware tiles, or other Roman remains which would corroborate this hypothesis of a Roman occupation have been discovered.

When the French came to the place in 1854 they found it had a population of some 10,000, and was considered the most important town for miles around. Its sultan ruled the city with an iron hand, but had little influence outside its walls. In this particular he was like all other sultans in the neighbourhood of the Desert. The wild tribes there have never paid other than lip service to their rulers.

The office of the Sultan of Touggourt—his Arab title was very long and very high-sounding, as most oriental titles are, and I shall not give it here—was hereditary. He was assisted in his rule by a council of sheiks, presided over by his khalifat or caliph, and he could command an army of about three thousand spears.

The Turks managed to subdue Touggourt, but not without great difficulty. The town was besieged for six months in 1789 by a Turkish army under Suleh Bey, the Governor of Constantine. The Turks themselves had no reason to want to capture the place, for Touggourt was never a wealthy city. But Suleh Bey had been promised by a traitor brother of the Sultan of Touggourt a very large sum if he would assist him to obtain the throne. Touggourt withstood a six months' siege before yielding. The Turks remained suzerains of the place and exacted a yearly tribute. The sultan took sides with them against the French, and it was a sultan of

Touggourt who was one of Abd-el-Kader's principal supporters in that gallant Arab's insurrection against the French. This sultan was rash enough to try and ambuscade a party of French soldiers, who after a few hours' fighting completely routed him and his followers. The sultan at once fled to Tunis, and next morning the French entered Touggourt and took possession of the Kasbah. And in Touggourt they have remained ever since.

It will be noticed from the illustrations that the inhabitants of Touggourt are very dark. Most of the people of the Desert are dark. This is due partly to the sun and partly to the free intermarriage of the Arabs with those of negro blood.

There is a large colony of Jews here, who have a quarter of the city to themselves. These, like the other Jews of the oasis towns, are not too particular about the garb they wear. Some affect the baggy trousers, zouave jacket and fez of their race, others again the burnous and head-dress of the Arab, supplemented by a white scarf with a blue border. The younger dress in European style. These Jews are as other Algerian Jews are, thrifty, inclined to be dirty, and very keen traders and business men. The making of jewellery here is done almost entirely by Jews, who are celebrated for their skill in the craft throughout the Sahara. They too use the simple tools for their work described in a previous chapter.

I said somewhere above that I thought this city was typically Arab. Its glory as an Arab city is decaying,

but its prosperity as a French town continues to increase. There is a railway station, public buildings and barracks, and one or two good hotels.

But it is in the Arab town itself that interest must always principally centre, in that vast huddle of mud-built houses, within whose narrow doorways a mysterious intriguing method of life has been going on for centuries, in those narrow, tortuous, shadeless streets, in those blind houses of the well-to-do, in the dignified mosques.

Even more often than in Biskra here in Touggourt market do you note the real inhabitants of the Desert, even more than there here do you note the calm fanaticism in the worn ebony and brown faces around, and feel with a deep curiosity how different the thoughts and sensations of their owners are from your own.

White burnouses seem whiter in the intense sunlight. The mud-coloured buildings take on a golden hue, the rags of the beggars, numerous here as everywhere in Algeria, seem more ragged still in the glare. Brown-coloured creatures stir in the shadows. Spahis in scarlet walk across the market-place. That pile of oranges in the sunlight looks like a pool of fire ! A blind beggar led up to you wails out a prayer for alms.

I spent some time at one particular patch of water on the outskirts of Touggourt in an effort to get some bird pictures. The day happened to be a particularly clear one. The sky, which was covered by mottled clouds, was reflected on the mirror-like lake in front of me. I got a fairly good photograph of this effect,

Market-place, Touggourt.

Reflections.

Facing page 248

which I reproduce. On the way to this water I passed what is known as "The Thirteen Seats," and noticed with sympathy a man squatting under a palm washing and mending his clothes piece by piece, whilst keeping himself respectably covered by those not being operated on.

Although Touggourt is modern compared with what it was when I last visited it, I was happy to be in the Desert once again. The Desert has a great fascination for me, and however much the novel writer's sheik may be written up or written down, that fascination never will cease to hold me, as it holds most others who have experienced the Desert's wondrous solitude and peacefulness.

It is wonderful to see the many uses that are made of the palm leaf in Touggourt. The streets, squares, and yards of the houses are swept with these leaves. The old leaves are cut out from the trees and are used as fuel; mats and baskets are made from them. They are used as a temporary covering for sheds. In fact, I don't know what the Touggourt Arab would do without the date palm.

It is said a date palm yields on an average a hundred and twenty pounds weight in a year. Every palm is taxed by the Government. The gathering time for dates is in the autumn.

Just outside Touggourt the sand has accumulated and gradually buried the palms. This sort of thing, as I have said, happens in a good many places in the Desert with the shifting sand, which is blown by the

wind like a snow-drift. If we only knew where, in this vast Sahara there exist, I dare say, ancient cities by the dozen full of architectural treasures, now covered by the sand. This piece of Desert between the sand dunes and Touggourt yields several instances of how man's works are obliterated in the wastes of sand.

I walked in a deserted cemetery. All sorts of odds and ends had been placed on those graves, even old clothing. A little marabout stood close by. The scene was a desolate one. In front of me the sand was drifting in, blown by the heavy wind. In the strong light it looked like water. What graves there were in the cemetery were already half covered with sand. And so it was with a hut or two near by.

From a tower in Touggourt I obtained a good view of the surrounding district. I reproduce a photograph showing the people on a market day from this tower.

Touggourt is a French military fort, and I often watched the troops drilling. Here as at Biskra were Spahis, the famous Arab horsemen who have joined the French army. I saw these drill separately. A charge by a troop of the Spahis is a sight well worth seeing. The illustration given does not half do justice to it.

Touggourt also is an excellent point from which to start a short or long expedition into the real Desert. The cost of a long expedition into the Desert is heavy. But the equipment you are provided with is very good indeed. And one must consider the fact that this equipment soon wears out. A tent does not last half

A dancing girl of Touggourt.

Facing page 250.

the time in the Desert that it would do in any other part of Africa.

The usual night performances of the dancing girls take place here, and are perhaps less sophisticated performances than the ones at Biskra. The Desert dancing girls pencil the rims of their eyes heavily with kohl, by this increasing the beauty of their eyes and preventing them from being affected so much by the bright sunshine. Like all Arab women they are very fond of perfumes, musk, attar of roses and amber being the favourite ones.

At this place I saw a similar negro minstrel to the ones I saw in Algiers and Biskra. So much alike were all three that you might have taken them for triplets. Hideous faces they had, with protruding lips, yellow bull-like eyes, receding foreheads and ape-like jaws. Their skins were ebony-black, and shone greasily. Their hair was short and woolly. Africans they were of a most debased type, little better than animals. They had decorated themselves with savage crudeness with bits of canisters, headgear made of the looking-glasses that are inside the lids of rouge boxes, bits of the skins of jackals and other animals. A picture to make one shudder!

One often wonders what sort of æsthetic sense these Africans have. The Moors, for instance. Do they love that beautiful architecture of theirs, or are they decadent creatures living among objects of art that they do not understand, like pigs in a deserted city?

Certainly the ideas on the subject of decoration

among the Desert dwellers are crude. They use empty bottles, for instance. Their use of empty bottles was illustrated to me here in Touggourt. A balcony ran round a building in front of me, and the scheme of decoration was carried out by using two empty bottles, neck to neck, as railing posts. That fitted in with the design of the building. Altogether I should say a couple of hundred had been used for this purpose.

Journeying south-west over the Desert, I entered an ancient town, Temacin, which was built seven hundred years ago. There is a tower there made of small bricks. In its shadows, under arches, there runs a street. Bones have been placed over the arches in the form of a cross, and are said to remove all bad thoughts from men. Much, I suppose, as a constant contemplation of skeletons takes away from a man's capacity for enjoying life.

The famous tower of Temacin, which is quite a high one, was built six hundred and fifty years ago by a Moroccan of Fez named Ahmed Ben Mohammed Lel Fassi, by order of Sidi Elhajabdallh, who died in Alexandria, Egypt, many centuries ago, and gave his name to the biggest mosque in the town. It is from this tower that the muezzin calls to the faithful the hours for the five prayers of the day. The bricks the tower is built of are worthy of notice. They were made by two Temacin specialists. These men alone held the secret of making such fine bricks. The secret died with them. They would never reveal it. And certainly it was worth revealing. The bricks

The famous tower of Temacin.

Facing page 252.

to-day are as good as when the building was first put up.

I expressed a wish to ascend the tower, and after some time had elapsed an Arab arrived with a key, which on trial it was found would not fit the door. But a small fact like this does not worry an Arab. Off the man went again, and eventually came back bringing both the right key and the caretaker of the mosque. In the meantime I had been driven nearly crazy by the noise an Arab school was making in my immediate vicinity. I could see the schoolboys plainly from where I stood. They were all gabbling their loudest. Each had a board on which were inscribed large Arabic signs in front of him. But they didn't bother about the board, their eyes were fixed on me.

On arriving at the top of the tower once again I surveyed from above the life in an Arab town. Around the roofs of the mud-houses runs a small mud wall two or three feet high. On the roofs you can see the inhabitants at this time of the year leisurely engaged in drying and grading the dates. These dates are packed away carefully. They are the Arab's principal food during the hot summer months.

A few sticks and palm leaves propped up on the roof serve to make a shelter from the sun. Underneath rest the wife or wives and family of the owner during the hot weather. Lying here they absorb what fresh air there is without incurring much danger of being seen by the outside world.

Looking down from my tower, I saw a woman

asleep in a corner of one of these roofs. Her baby slept alongside her. Near by two goats were at play. They began jumping backwards and forwards over the pair without apparently disturbing their slumbers. It was by a pure accident that I was able to catch a glimpse of this woman. It does not fall to the lot of many male travellers to see the Arab wife unveiled. Even near relatives very often never behold the faces of their female relations. An Arab boy who used to go out with me on my expeditions told me that although his aunt had lived with his mother and himself for some years he had never beheld her face. On questioning him further he said that when returning home each evening he had to call out on reaching the house, so that a chance might be given for the women to retire or veil themselves.

Boys are boys all the world over, and in the composition of the average boy there is more than a little horse sense. The Arab boy has, perhaps, more than his share of that characteristic. He is very wide-awake indeed. This was brought home to me very forcibly in this town of Temacin. I had taken a picture of a very small urchin covered with flies while he stood on a pair of stilts of his own manufacture. These stilts consisted of two old canisters fastened to the sides of a couple of sticks. I examined these stilts and congratulated him on his powers of invention. I put my hand into my pocket, a thing one is always doing in the Desert.

"There 's a franc for you!" I said.

Bird's-eye view of Temacin.

Facing page 254.

The urchin ran off shouting in triumph. Imagine my feelings later on when emerging from a small Arab café I discovered the street almost blocked up with Arab boys on stilts. They had heard of the triumph of their comrade, and had rushed to the manufacture of stilts. Tins being a luxury in this part of the world, they had used date palm branches instead, and many were the methods they had employed to build a stilt or resemblance of one.

In front of me bobbed a sea of happy faces. All their owners were speaking at once and offering me their services for a franc!

A few miles away from this town lies Tamellaht. Here stands the Mosque of Zaouia. The approach to this mosque is also by way of a street running under curious arches and cross-bones. Inside the mosque is the railed-in tomb of Zaouia and his son. Above it hang flags which have been placed there by pilgrims who had also performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, and had so earned the title of "Hadji." Although it was very dark inside this mosque, a four-minute exposure gave me the accompanying photograph of the interior. I was anxious to get a photograph particularly of the wonderful design of the place and the still more wonderful penknife work on the walls and ceilings of the dome. This penknife work must have entailed a great deal of labour. It was not a job I should have cared to tackle personally. The effect on the worker's neck through constant looking up must have been anything but pleasant.

After leaving the courtyard of this mosque you pass through covered-in streets. The strong Desert light was full on the end of the passage as I went along it. The Arabs standing in groups gossiping, with their gear beside them, formed a picturesque scene.

Just after leaving here I saw a very fine wedding party going along on a couple of camels. Or rather I saw the curtains and had to imagine the beauty of the swarthy creatures sitting behind them. These wonderful tents on the "Expresses of the Desert" never yet afforded me a glimpse of anything worth writing about.

My guide—I generally have a guide with me, the presence of one keeps undesirables off——noted my interest in the camels. He also knew that I was a naturalist, and he took the opportunity to add to my knowledge of the natural history of the camel. The Prophet Mohammed, he said, once found it necessary to make a long journey through the Desert. The way was sandy and waterless. It was country where a horse could not survive. The Prophet knelt down, as he always did when in trouble, and, with his head buried in his hands, prayed fervently to Allah. When he uncovered his face he found a strange creature standing beside him ready equipped for the journey. It was a camel which Allah had promptly created to relieve the necessity of his beloved Prophet. And this was the origin of the camel.

Roof of mosque at Tamellaht.

Facing page 256.

Chapter X

THE SHIFTING SANDS

I

IT was from Tamellaht that I made an extended tour into the Desert. That is the place to fly to if one wants a really restful couple of months. In that wonderful air nerve trouble disappears, as every other trouble nearly seems to do.

Camp life is very much the same in the Desert as it is in any other part of Africa, with the difference that in the Desert there is often a scarcity of water.

But water is sometimes short in Central Africa too. I can remember a two and three days' march in waterless country there, when the water had to be carried in huge bags by native porters, and in addition to that the other conditions of travel were unpleasant. The Sahara has an advantage over such a place as that. Here the camel acts as porter. He is a great improvement on the man-porter, and he can do without water for six or seven days, whereas man must have water to drink at least every few hours. Travelling in the Sahara, although expensive, is in my opinion comparatively easy work, and can be done with comfort. You need fear no damage from wild beasts here, and

only occasionally from your fellow-men. You are on a plain and can see long distances. It is true that there is a danger of getting lost and perishing for want of water, but that danger under modern conditions is much lessened.

During my travels I have experienced dangers of different types, and I think the most terrifying time you can go through is when you are practically dying from thirst.

Being lost in the Desert is not like being lost in the bush. In the bush, if you have any knowledge of the district and of botany, you can often find and cut into what looks like a very useless kind of tree knowing that it is a reservoir of water. I remember poor George Outram showing the young soldiers, or rather the inexperienced soldiers, what to do in case they were lost in the African bush. The look of astonishment on their faces when they saw him produce two or three pints of water from the most unlikely looking tree was comic to behold. In spite of his teaching, however, some months afterwards when I was out on patrol, two of our men got lost in the jungle near our camp and died of thirst. The Arab, who has lived for generations in the Desert, is still just as much dumbfounded by the demonstrations of the French who bring to light water in the sand, where he never dreamt it existed, as were the soldiers Outram tried to teach when he showed them water in a tree.

On my way south I camped near the famous sand dunes of this part of the Sahara. They are well worth

seeing. These sand dunes are extraordinarily deceptive. Perhaps they are the greatest deception in the Desert except the mirage, in fact a sand dune in certain lights is the most deceiving object I have ever come across. Take these famous dunes, for instance. I could have sworn when I looked at them in the distance that they were anything up to fifteen hundred feet high. When I was about a mile away they were beginning gradually to flatten out, and by the time I got up to them they were a mere nothing, I should say only a couple of hundred feet high. Worse still from my point of view, when I photographed them they came out practically flat. It is the light that makes their appearance so deceptive. At certain times of the day, especially in the morning and the evening when shadows are longer, they seem to grow in height. When the sun is high they lie flat. In fact, you can almost tell the time of day by them.

I camped by the dunes for the night after watching a beautiful sunset. It is when the sun is setting, I think, that the Desert appeals to me most. During the glare of the day the light is often unendurable. Every particle of sand catches it and throws it back again. And one feels, too, when looking over the interminable mounds and hillocks of tawny sand, utterly lonely. But the red glow of the sun exercises, on me at any rate, a comforting influence. And the beauty of its going down is often sublime. I remember its beauty that evening. I remember that the sun's spears pierced the ruddy sky long after he had disappeared, that the

whole Desert blushed like a girl, and that the darkness came, deep violet, and wonderfully soothing.

Sunset in the Desert is a thing you look forward to seeing. A wanderer, I have seen the sun rising and setting in many lands. Only once have I seen anything to equal a real Sahara sunset. That was in Borneo. It was a golden sunset, the one I remember seeing there. Sea and sky, the palms and reed huts themselves had the appearance of being turned to gold. I witnessed this sunset sitting on a Borneo beach, with the fishermen beside me and the China Sea whispering at my feet. . . .

That night, sitting round the camp-fire, we watched the moon rise. This reminded my old guide of another story. He said :—

"You know, Master, how the moon came to be made ? First you must be acquainted with the fact that the moon was the sun, and shone brightly in the daytime. But presently he became proud, and then more proud, and then more proud still. Finally, he was guilty of disrespect to Allah, and Allah was very angry and said : 'Now you may no longer be the sun—and shine by day. No, I will make a new sun —and he shall shine in the day and you shall only shine in the night in his reflected light.' And as Allah decided, so it was, Master. And since then we have the moon shining at night in the sky. But only since that time !"

Such simple tales tell one more of the Arab than pages of description.

The night was cold, but I slept well. I was up before

sunrise, and the Arabs soon got our caravan under way. We travelled in the light of the dawn for about an hour, admiring as we went the beauties of the wonderful Desert scenery. Everything looked peaceful. The sun was shining its brightest.

And then, suddenly, as if a mighty hand had pulled a lever, the scene changed. One of my camel-men was the first to note the approaching danger. He uttered a cry and pointed with his right hand. Following the direction of his outstretched arm, I saw in the distance a black, heavy bank approaching us. It came on like the wind. A curious groaning or moaning sound began to fill the hot air. The whole Desert appeared to be moving like a snake. Giddy as the sight made me, I began instinctively to think of a picture. But darker and darker everything became. Earth and sky seemed to be mingling together. And next moment the most violent sandstorm I had ever experienced swept down on our caravan. My camels laid down, and so did the men. I got out a camera and fidgeted about looking for fresh studies. I walked some eighty yards away from my camels to see if I could get a picture of the moving sand from an eminence, ultimately falling over a ridge and nearly losing my life. Suffocated and half blinded, like a fool I tried to struggle up on to the ridge again. Sand came over me by the bucketful, and I felt that my end was near.

The Arabs knew better than I how to deal with the situation. I never realised before what use they make of their burnouses on such an occasion. It is

indeed a wonderful garment. During the whole of the sandstorm every Arab of my party lay huddled up completely enveloped in his burnous. And huddled up methodically too, the turban wrapped over the nose and mouth, then the hood pulled over head and face, the burnous drawn round him like some large shawl.

Meanwhile I stood there helpless. My clothing was quite unsuited for life in a sandstorm. Loose wrappings are necessary at such times, and these the Arab clothing provided. An instance of how man, like other animals, adapts himself to his environment.

The storm grew worse than ever. It suddenly dawned on me that by walking in the same direction as the wind to more open ground where the sand was not driving so thickly I might regain my breath. This I did, much to my relief.

The storm abated. Looking down at myself, I saw that I was covered with what looked like half the Desert. My hair, eyes, ears, nails, mouth were choked, my face was sore with the buffeting of the driving, cutting sand.

I was now getting anxious about my cinematograph camera, as the fine sand was likely to ruin it. The footprints I had made in going there were obliterated, as were also those I made on my return to the camels. A man in a sandstorm leaves no tracks. It is the simplest thing in the world to lose him.

I got back to the camels. They were calmly kneeling and at intervals shaking the sand from their

long coats as I have seen cattle do in Yorkshire when they were covered with snow.

After the storm had ceased we moved along and made camp.

The day following the sandstorm turned out beautiful. The silence and solemnity of the Desert contrasted strangely with its rage the day before, when the wind howled and moaned as if hell itself had been let loose. We were right in the Desert now. Around us as far as the eye could see was nothing but waves of sand and dunes. As I went along I noted at a place where the sand was slightly damp the foot-prints of small Desert rats. They had been out in the night searching for food. I told myself that they do not travel far, these little things. Somewhere close to where I was their home probably lay.

I lingered for long hoping to get a glimpse of one of the little fellows. But I was disappointed. I had time to linger. My intention was to spend several days in the Desert.

As I sunned myself that day after having had a little luncheon I saw a bird hopping along a sand-bank. I looked around for his mate. But no, there was only one of him. He hopped on to a sandy ridge and disappeared. He gave me no chance of studying him further that day. The following day, just after luncheon, the bird appeared again and approached me. When he came to within ten yards of me I recognised him as the lone-chat, a bird that inhabits the dunes, and one that I have never on any occasion

seen with a mate. It is because of his solitary way of life, I suppose, that he is called the lone-chat. What the bird lives on I don't know, probably some sort of small sand-worm. While he was hopping about close to me I threw him a little bit of meat. This he promptly discovered and ate. Before we bade each other good-bye he had become so friendly that if I sat perfectly still he would hop within a foot of me. His visits to me—he only paid three—lasted about half an hour. I made a few studies of him whilst he was scratching up the sand to get out a bit of mutton I had thrown down.

If it is really the case that this little solitary wayfarer is called "lone-chat" because of his loneliness, he is well named, for he is one of the most lonely birds I ever met. You feel pleased when you see him among the dunes, despite the fact that the Desert is no place for a bird, and I often think of that bird hopping about like a lost soul in the vast waste of the sand he inhabits. He would come close up to me and then just as silently go away, stoop apparently to pick up some food in the sand. The next moment he had fluttered farther off again. The only other bird that ever gave me a similar uncanny feeling was Clark's Jay in the Rocky Mountains. He was just as silent.

Pages have been written about the wonderful power the Arab guide has of finding his way across the Desert when the track is gone. It is the guide's camel, I think, more than the guide, uncannily clever as some of these are, who has that power, or rather

instinct. The camel may be a stupid beast, in fact I think he is in many ways, but he certainly has a good bump of locality.

In my opinion a camel is in this respect like a horse I rode one night across the Yorkshire moors many years ago when snow lay heavy on the ground. I was caught by darkness falling just after I had left the walls which surround the pasture land before you come on to the lonely moors. I felt my way onwards, but had not gone far when all signs of a road disappeared. The darkness grew black, so black as to blind me. We were homeward bound. So I thought I would see what animal instinct would do for me, and just let that horse have his head. Would you believe it, he did the eight miles through the pitch blackness and the snow without a falter and without a fall. How he found the road has always been a puzzle to me. But I know we must have kept to it, otherwise we must have come to grief in several places where there was a fall from fifteen to a hundred feet.

It is an interesting thing to see and study the Arab's clothing. On his head he wears a white felt fez. Upon this he twists his haik or turban, a strip of white wool or gauze, which hangs flat on the back of his head, is brought round to cover the mouth if necessary, hangs draped about shoulders and neck, and finally is fastened round the wearer's waist by means of a belt made of gauze or silk, which prevents its ends from falling to the ground. The haik is tied on the head with a piece of tape. The head-covering or

turban is about six yards long and about one yard wide.

On the body an Arab wears a gandoura or gown made of white wool, over this a woollen burnous, and over that other burnouses, the number depending on the season of the year and the temperature. It takes about fifteen yards of cloth to make a burnous.

The Arab wears white cotton pantaloons, and is one of the few people who put on extra clothing to keep out the heat.

The burnous is admirably adapted for keeping out the heat and sand, but at first sight it appears to be cumbersome. After you have lived with the Arab, however, it seems to fit in with the landscape, and you recognise also that he wears it gracefully. That is more than a European can. The costume needs the man. I will defy any European to put on a burnous and walk past me without my detecting the fact that he is a foreigner to the Desert. An Arab is a slow-moving, graceful person, having none of the quick-moving characteristics of the European. In fact, I understand that the man who walks smartly is despised by the Arab as being full of conceit.

I have read most of Burton's *Pilgrimage to Mecca*. It has always puzzled me how he, a European, got to Mecca without being discovered. He was, of course, nearly discovered, but not quite. I know the Desert. I know the Arabs and their religion. Perhaps I can appreciate more than the stay-at-home person the skill

and courage, the greatness of the man who went alone to Mecca.

I was having a nap one day when my guide woke me up and, walking away, beckoned me to a little rough, scaly, caked patch of sand. Then he stooped and pointed in front of him. At first I did not see the object he was pointing at, but after a few seconds I detected the horns and the top of the head of that deadly and dreaded reptile, the horned viper.

It is said that this is the species of viper that killed the love-sick Cleopatra. It is the only animal that I know of on the Desert whose bite is always fatal.

On my first visit to the Sahara I searched for and killed horned vipers for the mere fun of the thing. There are various forms of amusement. Killing horned vipers is as well a useful way of passing the time. A man has to have keen eyesight if he wants to go in for this game. In the heat of the day the vipers bury themselves under the sand, with the exception of the top of the head, only leaving out sufficient of it for the eyes to see. They harmonise, too, so closely with the sand that you often pass them without being aware of it. I have sat quite close to one for half an hour before noticing it.

On my last visit I was trying to get a moving picture of a horned viper, and very nearly came to grief in my anxiety to do so. I was using a short focus lens and taking the picture within a couple of feet of my subject. I was trying to persuade my charming viper to show what she could do in the way

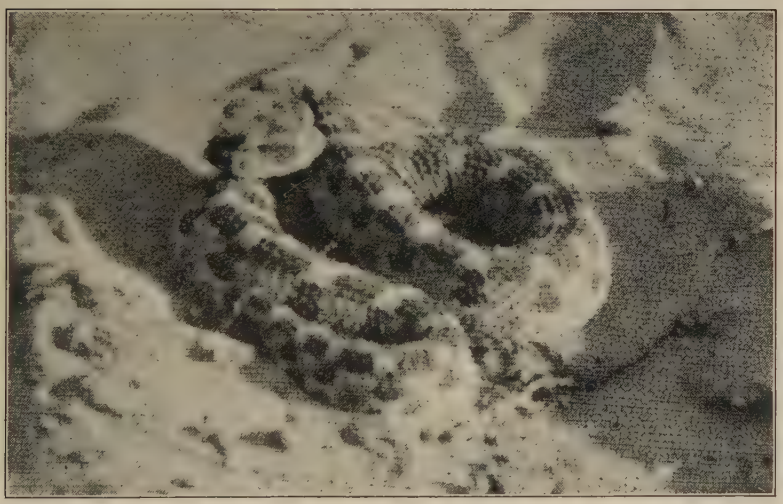
of moving over the sand—they sometimes use it as a lever and move their body sideways, not ahead, as an ordinary snake does. She suddenly struck, and missed me by the fraction of an inch. Although the day was a broiling one, I experienced a very chilly feeling about the spine. I thought for a moment the lady had scratched me. It was much the same sort of sensation as I experienced once when I had every reason to believe I had swallowed a deadly poison.

Talking of poisons reminds me of a method they have in one of the wild parts of Africa when the question of accuracy between two people is in dispute. The two disputants go before the chief. A bowl of poison is produced. Each disputant drinks half. The one who dies first has been the liar. A simple method of settling disputes which might often with advantage be introduced into this country. I suppose, however, our lawyers would object, as through its adoption they would lose their means of livelihood!

I was wandering now in what is perhaps the most characteristic corner of the Sahara. The features of interest of this part of the Desert are many. That excellent writer, the late Mr. March Phillips, visited the country a few years ago, and I quote from his book, which I think is the best description of the Desert I have yet come across :—

"The Oued Souf, lying east of Touggourt, forms a portion of the Grand Erg, the region of pure sand dunes. The decomposition of the Desert's structure—of rock and cliff and plateau—is here completely carried out.

Horned viper—on the move.



Horned viper—on the alert.

Facing page 268.

The last pebble has been resolved into the grains that composed it. The whole landscape is a testimony to the successful perseverance of the sand, and bears witness to its victory.

"Hour after hour and day after day for several days the curved slopes of sand lay round us, as pure as drifts of snow just fallen. Not a blade of green marked their surface. The whiteness of the sand was dazzling, and its absolute monotony and sameness, combined with the deep, equally unvarying blue of the sky, produced an effect of eccentricity not far removed from the grotesque.

"The dunes succeed each other in an endless array of hillocks, rarely divided, in my recollection, by an appreciable flat. The caravan proceeds by winding in and out between their bases. Let the reader picture a field sprinkled as thickly as they can be set together with molehills. Let him, if he can, by an effort of imagination, turn these molehills pure and white, and see with his mind's eye a string of black insects making a cockscrew progress by winding in and out between them, and he will have a bird's-eye view of our caravan among the dunes.

"As we entered into these white defiles an unutterable deadness, emptiness, and mortal stillness seemed to close about us. The unreality of the landscape was added to by the loss of all sense of proportion. The scenery is mountainous on a diminutive scale. It suggests an endless array of chains of hills and mountain summits, the similarity of which in shape to formation

of real ranges gives the idea of considerable size. Crest beyond crest, and ridge beyond ridge, they stretch away into the distance. It is impossible to judge their dimensions or the width of the valleys that separate them. Nothing exists that can supply a standard of measurement; no trees, or house, or rock, or other object gives scale to the picture. No atmospheric effect softens the further outlines and suggests their distance. In this pure air you see all things, as it were, in a vacuum, and the distant ranges are as clear and white as the nearer ones.

"Under these circumstances the instinct of a European is enormously to exaggerate the size and distance apart of the hills. The peak you can see some way off, lifting its head above its fellows, will seem a Mont Blanc, to be measured in thousands of feet. The last range you can distinguish on the horizon will seem a day's journey off. In five minutes you are passing under Mont Blanc, which turns out to be a hillock of two or three hundred feet high, and in another five are crossing the range where you thought to camp for the night.

"In spite of constant correction I never could get the hang of the scenery. Again and again I rubbed the illusion of great size and space out of my eyes, but it always returned. Our caravan itself was the only object that could give a standard, and this it sometimes did with a very startling effect. Repeatedly, after riding forward, H—— and I would sit on some blond summit and watch the vast tumbled

expanse that lay around us until we had all unconsciously received the impression of its vastness. Then through a gap far away would come a terrifying spectacle—gigantic beasts, half as big as the hills themselves, with curved outstretched necks and huge men lolling on their backs. They came bearing down upon us with leisurely gait, that somehow left the hills and valleys behind in a few steps. For a moment one was aware of a struggle between scenery and camels as to the correct size of scale. Then as a realisation of Ahmeda's cooking-pots asserted itself the scenery would give in and collapse pitifully to its real dimensions. To a stranger's eye the existence of water in this country of the Souf would seem hopelessly out of the question. But it is never safe in the matter of water to judge the Sahara by appearances. We are now in the trough of that great depression which drains towards the shotts and the water-carrying strata here approach nearest to the surface. Frequently among these dunes there is but a crust of earth dividing the water from the surface. The gardens of these regions fill small hollows excavated by hand between the dunes, so that the palms have their roots in the soaked strata. The oases look like round bowls of green plants set in the earth, the tops of the palms reaching to about the level of the Desert.

"There are three kinds of oases. First, the river oases, which are confined to the neighbourhood of hills sufficiently big to attract a rainfall. The descending water quickly sinks beneath the sandy floor of the

Desert, but during the winter and spring its beds will frequently carry for some distance a torrent which in summer either dries up entirely or shrinks to a slender line of stagnant pools. The oases are planted, sometimes in the bed of the river, sometimes on its bank, and the water is intercepted by barrages and conducted by an elaborate system of water-courses to the palms. These are, however, not the most prosperous oases, the water being apt to fail just at the season when the palms have most need of it.

"The second kind are those fed by wells, whether bored by the Arabs themselves or by the artesian process, which is now steadily supplanting the native method. Of these I have already spoken. They represent the only possibility or hope of mitigating the awful sterility of the Desert. To what extent the system may be generally applied is a question it is impossible to answer fully as yet. Southward to Ouargla and the farthest French outposts wells have been pierced, and oases planted or renovated, and in many places from points of vantage the windings of the hidden river may be traced by the spots of green which mark its course, each one of which is secretly sucking at the buried stream. Through parts of the Tunisian Desert, and especially along the eastern coast, where forests of palms have been planted in the last fifty years, the artesian apparatus has been used with signal effect. There is reason to suspect that in many districts in the Sahara it can be employed. The signs and cuttings of prehistoric rivers are traceable

in places throughout the central and southern Deserts, and these are held to indicate the presence of subterranean water. Certain mountain ranges, as the Borku and Tibesti groups in the east, the Ahaggar and Tademait in the centre, and the Adrar in the west, have a rainfall and encourage hopes of irrigation. The great oases of the central desert at Tuat, Tidikelt, and throughout the Gourata Valley are rich in water, and capable probably of considerable extension. Several artesian wells have already been sunk there. And there are numbers of other spots where villages and a restricted fertility already exists, and these it is expected may be enlarged and their number added to. It is, in fact, in the artesian process that the optimists see a hope of the Sahara undergoing in time such a change as will fit it to be included in a scheme of civilised organisation. A settled population may through it be increased, the trade of the old caravan routes may be revived, travelling may become safe and comparatively easy, a trans-Saharan railway may link the Sudan with the north, the control of the Government over the predatory tribes may become more tangible and effective. There is something so attractive even to the mere traveller in the creation of oases —the work strikes one as so purely beneficent, and the appeal made to the eye and the imagination is so emphatic— that anyone who travelled in the Desert and who remembers—and who can forget ?—the change from the blazing waste of sands to the dense thickets of palms, and the delight of being received

from the outer glare into the green embrace of these groves, must always think of the work with sympathy and be under the temptation, perhaps, to exaggerate its prospects. The Sahara is the ultimate problem with which all the French North African colonies are concerned. Follow up any one of them and it brings you to the Desert. The Desert forms the vast core of this great empire, and before the separate colonies can become united in anything but name the question how to span these almost uninhabited wastes, how to extend the oases, and how to curb the enterprise of Bedouin marauders will have to be dealt with. There are pessimists in regard to the part that well-sinking may be made to play in the schemes of union as well as optimists. The moderates, however, while they agree that the hopes of the Sahara must not be pitched in the key of the Oued Bir, are sanguine that the work of irrigation may be so extended as to render French occupation of the Desert effective. Much hangs on this issue. The permanent nature of the artesian borings has already introduced, wherever it has succeeded, a quite new sense of security into Arab life. The French wells apparently do not "die." The villagers not being haunted by the fear of having to abandon their homes and push off into the waste, and being bullied and plundered and even actually enslaved by their nomad brethren, as was the happy custom in the days of yore, attach themselves permanently to the soil and range themselves on the side of law and order. It must be remembered, too,

that the stability of the Government which protects them depends itself on the creation of habitable centres, since it is impossible to exercise efficient control over the Desert except from points of vantage within it. Thus the mitigation of Desert sterility by means of oases and springs and the pacification of the Desert tribes are aspects of the same process. Pacification depends on fertilisation."

As I was intent on getting some good cine. records, the most annoying feature about the Desert during this last visit of mine has been the desolation. The Desert seems desolate to everyone, but to the camera man it is d—— d—— desolate. There is scarcely anything to photograph.

Carcasses of camels grinning in the sunlight? Bones of dead camels, long ago picked dry by the rats and insects, and polished by the blowing sand? One can't be photographing these eternally, although in the many waterless parts of the route south one comes across them always. A single stunted thorn tree? Well, he's unique, and ought to be proud of himself, growing as he does seemingly out of sand, the only tree within miles, a veritable King of the Castle. A vulture soaring overhead, a rare enough sight in the Desert? A pretty good subject if he comes close enough, which he probably won't, unless the bait is tempting.

Look at the photographs of the Desert, and you get an idea, a poor one, but still an idea, of its vast solitudes. Think of the people who have to spend their lives there. They are small in number, a few thousand

spread over a country nearly as big as Europe, a country of illimitable sand and desolation. They dwell in small oases beside wells that have existed there through the long ages, beside a few scattered date palms that grow out of the sand. Every gust of wind blows the sand about them, fine, silver, burning sand. It gets into their eyes and inflicts ophthalmia on them, into their noses, into their lungs. You will see from photographs that these people of the Sahara, the Touaregs, the Beri-Beris, the Arabs, wear their hoods low over their eyes and high up over their mouths in an effort to keep out the sand.

But they can't keep it out. It gets everywhere—into the food, into the huts, and at times it threatens to overwhelm the huts themselves, and in cases more than threatens. The little oasis, the few date palms, the well, the flat-roofed houses, perhaps a dozen or so, the inhabitants see these slowly and pitilessly covered by the drifts. It is the place which they and their fathers before them have called home for perhaps centuries. Imagine their feelings as the sand heaps up about it, slowly and slowly, pitiless as the ocean. They try and fight it, pulling down the branches of the date palms and erecting fences, digging, throwing away the sand. But it always comes back, just as the tide came back to Canute when he sat upon the shore.

The sand is to the Desert what the water is to the ocean. It is almost equally liquid, and almost equally pervasive, almost equally unrelenting.

It must be a puzzle to the inhabitants of these

Shifting sands.

Sand lizard.

Facing page 276.

burning wastes sometimes to get enough food to support life. There are one or two industries in the Sahara, unimportant, comparatively speaking. The principal one, legitimate, that is, is the salt industry.

Water is scarce enough in all conscience in the Desert. And in many places it has the impudence, when it puts in an appearance, to arrive in a condition when it can't be drunk. That is to say, it is salt or briny.

Left to evaporate in the burning sun, this salt quickly deposits crystals. The inhabitants of the oasis towns of the mid-Sahara, Bilma is the biggest of these, scrape these crystals from the bottom of the shallow pools, stuff them into moulds and turn them out to dry. In shape the finished article looks like one of those cones of white sugar which the older readers will remember as being a common exhibit in the shops of grocers some twenty or thirty years ago.

This salt, although cheap where made, fetches high prices in the distant parts of the Sahara, to which it is borne on the backs of camels. Some of the salt caravans are very big affairs, as many as seven thousand camels taking part in them. A disastrous thing happened some time ago in the Desert south of Ouargla. The whole of the biggest salt caravan of the year was captured by raiders, who massacred nearly all the people accompanying it.

That brings me to a second trade still carried on in the Sahara, this being an illegitimate trade, and a favourite one with those degenerate Berbers, the

Touaregs. It is raiding. At least, you and I would call it an illegitimate trade. Perhaps, however, if the date crop had failed, and our wives and children were starving, we might look at the matter through a different pair of spectacles. Raiding is at once the business and the pastime of these dwellers in the silent sands. The inhabitants of some quite large oases exist on it. Fuchi is one of these oases, I believe. One cannot be sued for libelling an oasis, or I should not mention this place's name. I met one or two Arabs from Fuchi in my trek southward through the sands, and I am not going to spend the week-end among them and their friends in that delectable township. Vultures in appearance were these men of Fuchi, thin, depraved-looking, with blood-shot brown eyes and features of a semi-negro cast.

There are a great many people of negro blood in the Sahara. But mixture as he is, you would never mistake the Sahara Arab for a negro. The colour of the two is quite different.

Two of the most noted raider tribes dwell in the range of mountains that runs east and west for some distance across the middle of the Sahara. The Beri-Beris, not so called because they are bery-bery bad, which they are, or because they suffer from the tropical disease of that name, which they do not, are perhaps the biggest ruffians in the Desert. The Touaregs are almost as bad as the Beri-Beris, and very much more celebrated. These are the famous veiled people of the Sahara, whom those who write alarming letters to the

newspapers about the advancing tide of militant Mohammedanism are so fond of mentioning. The Touaregs are not, I am glad to say, likely to become a danger to the British Empire or to the French. In the whole of the Air Mountains, the part of these ranges mentioned above which they inhabit, there are only a few thousand Touaregs left, and the Desert itself contains perhaps a similar number. They have been christened " The Veiled People of the Desert," because they wear their haiks over eyes and mouth in the usual Sahara fashion. They are light coloured, own slaves, flocks, horses, camels, cultivate the barren soil of the mountains spasmodically, using their slaves for the purpose, and go about heavily armed. One encounters bands of these gentlemen occasionally as far north as Ouargla. On my present visit to the Desert I was unfortunate—or fortunate—enough not to meet any of them.

What with raiding and being raided, these unfortunate, starved people of the Sahara are always in a state of trepidation. The women and children never know the minute when the sentry on the adjacent sand dunes will come riding in with an excited tale of hostile camels coming rapidly across the sand. Then they themselves with their few valuables and a goat or two will have to flee to the nearest place of safety or the most easily-defended position. It is a case of dog eating dog to-day in the Sahara, outside the French sphere of influence. There are no rabbits left! No wonder the population continues to dwindle.

Another characteristic of the Sahara is the heat. The average temperature there is from 105° to 110° in the shade. And there isn't any shade! The sun blazes down on you all day with a ferocity which has to be experienced in order to be realised. It scorches and withers all but the very hardiest of vegetation. It blackens the skin of the dwellers within the confines of the Desert, and the glare of it tortures them. And there is no escaping this heat and glare. If you live in the Sahara you have to put up with it, day in, day out, for months at a time.

And yet, strangely enough, I for one would rather stand a month of Sahara weather than a really hot August in London. You do breathe pure air there, not petrol vapour. You can wear what you please, and are not required to decorate yourself with a stiff collar and patent leather boots every evening.

No, instead of a muggy dining-room with stuffy upholstery, stuffy food, and equally stuffy conversation —people in London are always stuffy in August—you drink in champagne with every breath you breathe, the cool night breeze comes gently, you smoke your pipe, leaning against some huge boulder, talk for a while with your Arabs, and then, tired out, drop into the refreshing sleep that only Desert travellers know. You are alone in a white glimmering world that stretches out far into the darkness, the sand is your pillow, the violet, star-decked sky your canopy.

As I have said somewhere above, I have never run short of water in the Desert. Nor do I believe that any

well-organised modern party would do so. Travelling is expensive here, and if your means of transport is to be the camel, which it usually is even nowadays if a really long trek is contemplated, the thing to be done is to take sufficient camels with you to carry all the wood, stores, and water you require. Water is usually carried in goat-skins, and a few extra goat-skins in your caravan makes all the difference between hardship and comparative comfort.

And yet for some time longer there must continue to be danger for those crossing the Sahara because of lack of water. A camel can go six days after filling up without quenching its thirst. But not in comfort. And in some places in the Sahara the nearest oases are often three hundred miles apart.

This to a man trying to work economically means pretty hard travelling, if he is to ensure that his Arabs and camels are to be kept free from the tortures of thirst.

There will be a railway across the Desert one of these days. And of course there are the Citroen caterpillar and other cars, specially designed for this sort of travel. But methods of transport here are bound to be primitive for some time to come. There is nothing for men to travel for. No profit to be made.

What is wanted is somebody to go to the Aïr Mountains and strike oil in big quantities. Then the district would soon open up. I should not think there can be oil there, at least any oil showing. For I have never come across any natives in this part of Africa

using anything in the way of unrefined oil in their lamps. But, on the other hand, natives are funny, conservative creatures—I dare say they think we are the same,—and I have known burnable oil exist in a country, and more, bubble from the ground in the jungle, without the inhabitants of the vicinity having learned the use it could be put to, or rather being satisfied to use the wax and coconut oil to which for generations they had been accustomed for the purpose of illumination.

Of animals in the true Sahara as distinguished from the mountainous region I have mentioned there are few, some of which, however, do not occur elsewhere.

There are ravens and rats which attack the dates. There is the "fennec" or Desert fox, a very shy, wary little creature, as all these Desert dwellers are. He lives on beetles, grasshoppers, small rodents and vegetation. There are hawks, vultures, eagles, some varieties of owl, and in places where more vegetation exists spotted pigeon, rollers, finches, storks, doves, and a few skunk, gazelle, antelope, and jackal.

The bustard used to be common in the Desert near Biskra, and chasing it was a favourite pastime among the Arabs.

The horsemen would form a wide circle around the bird, and gradually narrow the circle till the bird was within range. And if you happened to be on the other side of the bird and within range also so much the worse for you.

Moufflon the hunter obtains by concealing himself

Desert fox.

Facing page 282.

near water and awaiting their approach, gazelle by taking cover, and waiting for hours, in the direction the herd is moving.

Of reptiles there are in the Desert among others the horned viper, which I have mentioned already, and there are various lizards.

I remember my rather amusing encounter with some of these. After travelling for some time we had halted the caravan for the purpose of giving men and camels a rest.

It was in a part of the Desert rather different in aspect from that which I have just described. The Desert, especially that between Ouargla and the mountains, is merely a white, sandy waste, but in other parts it varies in character from this. Sometimes it is a twisted land, furrowed with dead water-courses, broken into a chaos of tormented peaks and chasms.

On another day you may be passing through hard land, on another still through small rocks, again through dwarf shrubs or over short herbage.

I was on sand now and sitting smoking a quiet pipe and enjoying every minute of my life as I always do when in touch with Nature. The day had been dark and overcast all the morning as if a sandstorm was threatening; but presently the sun broke through, very weakly at first as if some mist covered it, but it finally got really bright and hot. Something, some movement in the sand, attracted my attention. I fixed my gaze on the spot. After some time the caked, crusted sand began to move. I thought,

surely this is a horned viper. The crust lifted again, and the sand began to trickle away from the little broken-up patch, or small slabs of sand, when a further movement brought to light a specimen of what is known in Algeria as the "Jeckos du Sable." This is a transparent lizard, somewhat resembling the Singapore house lizard. I waited motionless, and after a little while another much smaller lizard also started to emerge. By this time the first one was basking in the sun. I suppose he took me for a bit of a rock or bush. Then the second, who was just shaking the sand off his feet as it rather looked like, touched the bigger one, and at lightning speed he turned round and bit the other little fellow. The impact of the collision was so great that they both rolled over in the sand. This was too good a chance to be missed, so I got a camera to work. But my larger friend would have none of this. He started digging himself in, like a jerboa does. So to get him to sit for his portrait I touched him, when he tried to bite me. At last with some effort I managed to get the study, which I reproduce. You will notice him in his fighting attitude. After I had got the picture I let him go. By this time his little companion had disappeared, probably scenting trouble. And my sitter friend quickly followed suit and burrowed into the sand.

A little way from here I saw several small common lizards running about, but was never able to get a picture of them. They would make off at too great a speed for me—quick was not the word—diving under

the little bits of dwarf bushes where they had their home. If I had dug them out I should have been still in the same position, as I could not corner or control them. After spending some time chasing them about in the sand I came to the conclusion I had discovered the finest weight-reducer known.

II

Oh, the happy days and nights I have spent in the Desert! I wish sometimes that these had lasted for ever.

Around the camp-fire I used to sit at nights with the Arabs swopping yarns. I would tell them of the thousands of head of game I had seen elsewhere in Africa and the wonders of the other parts of the world. I tried to give them some idea of what huge waterfalls and really high mountains looked like. Sometimes I used to think that they didn't quite believe me. I don't blame them. How could people who had always dwelt in the Desert know any better?

The animals they were most interested in were the elephant and giraffe. Many were the questions they asked me about these animals, how high was the giraffe, what did the elephant feed on, and so on. When I told them, as an illustration of what the giraffe could do, that he was able to reach high enough to pick the dates off many of their trees, one of them suggested that a giraffe would be a fine animal to train

to do that job for them, as picking dates was tedious and trying work.

Some of them seemed to have a hazy idea of the lion, but I did not gather that they had ever seen a lion nor fathom the reason why the animal seemed familiar to them until all of a sudden I remembered my blind lion of years ago mentioned in a previous chapter. Then I discovered that this was the lion they had heard about.

It is wonderful to me, but it is true, that very few Arabs know much about the animal life of the surrounding Desert. In many respects they are singularly narrow. Most of them are very illiterate. An Arab venerates learning in his holy men, but seems to have little use for it himself.

I attribute this characteristic to the life the Arab has had to lead for centuries. It has been a constant struggle, a struggle with bloodthirsty neighbours and an inhospitable soil.

Learning and culture need for their successful growth moderate prosperity and settled conditions. In the Dark Ages, when the life lived by Europeans was similarly precarious to that which Arabs live now, learning ceased to flourish, and would indeed have died out but for the fact that the flame was kept alive by monks and others living a sheltered life in monasteries.

The Arabs have no similar religious bodies to act as centres of culture in their midst, nor, I believe, has an attempt been made to institute them. This is

as would have been expected. Not much constructive work is done by Islam.

The fact is that the Mohammedan religion is a great destroyer, not a builder-up. And its adoption by the Arab has wiped out any culture he may have possessed. Previous to its introduction into Arabia the Arab culture was fairly advanced. There were first-rate poets in the country and also good architects and the Arab style of living was excellent. In fact, in olden times "Arabian" was synonymous with "luxurious."

The Arabs before Mohammed's day were idolaters. Polygamy and polyandry were permitted. But the women had rights equivalent to those which an average European woman possesses now.

Mohammed cast out the idols—they had one for each day of the year at Mecca—but he enslaved the Arab women. He had ten wives himself. Ayesha, a pretty one, gave him cause for jealousy. So he invented a harem to keep her in. And it is because of this jealousy he had for Ayesha that millions of Mohammedan women are caged to-day.

Of course, it is true that, as the Jews say, "God has given nine-tenths of the lust of the world to the Arabs;" but it seems strange that people who live in this, in summer time, the hottest part of the globe, should shut up their women-folk in those little mud huts of theirs.

This hiding of women behind the purdah is the mark of a backward race. There is nothing like having a few women about for keeping men up to the scratch.

The foremost races to-day are those which allow their women-folk at least an equality with the men. And this is only what one would expect. A son usually takes after his mother. Wives kept behind the purdah are necessarily ignorant, usually lazy, and very often cunning, untruthful, and given to intrigue. Small wonder, then, that the Arab possesses all these qualities.

He has also the qualities which generations of hard living in the Desert have given him. He is hard, fierce, bold, unscrupulous, and courageous. In fact, he is emphatically a man. And he admires these qualities in others. The bulk of his poetry deals with the bold deeds of heroes in desert frays, ambuscades, combats, and retreats.

In person he is, when pure blooded, thin, athletic, and supple-jointed—his various changes of posture in prayer are excellent physical drill for him—and rather Jewish-looking. He is really a Jew, being in fact pure Semitic in origin. His religion, and he will acknowledge it, is in many ways like the Jewish religion. Also he is inclined to be a bit of a Jew in money matters, indeed frugality is a virtue he is commanded by the Prophet to practise.

He is also commanded by the Prophet to be cleanly. Public baths exist in all large towns in Algeria. But water is a scarce commodity in most places where the Arab lives, and no doubt he is as cleanly as circumstances permit.

Town life does not suit the Arab. Soft living and contact with civilisation cause him to lose all those

manly qualities with which he is endowed. Do not judge the Arab of the Desert by the gentlemen you meet about Algiers and Biskra. The Arab of the towns—the tout, guide, beggar, the sort of scum that lives on the tourist—is one thing, the Arab of the Desert is another.

March Phillips did not like the Arab of the Desert, as may be gathered from the following passage :—

"The Arab and Touareg nomads are fierce and dangerous races, but it is not by armed expeditions and flying columns that they will be finally dealt with, but rather by weakening those natural conditions which sustain them. The Desert stands for the principle of incoherence in Nature. The Arab stands for the same thing in society. He may be trusted to flourish and exercise his peculiar gifts, to pillage and rob and plunder and generally disintegrate every existing form of social structure, so long as the conditions favourable to such an existence reign in the Sahara. . . ."

I admit that the Arab has robber qualities, such as courage and craftiness. They are qualities which have distinguished most of the manly men since the beginning, qualities which it is as necessary for the soldier and the business man to possess to-day as it was for his ancestor hundreds of years ago. Of course, I, as one whose life has been spent mostly in conditions where these qualities are necessary, may overrate them. I love the Arab of the Desert for his possession of them, and for his devotion to his strange religion. I would that other men were more like him.

The devotion of a good Desert Arab to his master is truly admirable. If you fall sick he is the finest nurse in the world. He moves quietly. He is restful, nerve-soothing, and unremitting in his attention. If anything goes wrong with the caravan, there is no fuss or bother. The Arabs never lose heart or fuss or make a noise.

I remember well on one of my expeditions in Central Africa that the head man was always shouting and growing excited over any little hitch. He got on my nerves completely. I remember the scorn the porters had for him. They called him " Kilalee," which means " The man who is always shouting."

In Central Africa, too, the men despise anyone who gets rattled. They, too, have a habit of giving their superiors nicknames. They christen even the white man, and I must say that the nickname is usually apt. I have had experience of porters in all parts of the world, and as a servant on an expedition where a better class of person is required I should place the Arab very high. All the Arabs I have had with me, and that is a good many, have been excellent fellows, quiet, obedient, and gentlemanly. They were of great assistance to me in my natural history work, entering into the spirit of the thing, whether it was digging holes in the sand, waiting to see what the animals would do, or going long distances on collecting expeditions, nothing was too much trouble for them.

They love their children dearly and, compared with other races living outside of Europe, are extremely

kind to animals. The Rev. J. G. Woods tells us something about their behaviour towards their faithful servant, the camel. He says :—

"The camel drivers behave towards their animals with the curious inconsistency which forms so large a part of the Oriental character. Prizing them above nearly all earthly things, proud of them, and loving them after their own fashion, the drivers will talk to them, cheer them, and sing interminable songs for their benefit. Towards the afternoon the singing generally begins, and it goes on without cessation in a sort of monotonous hum. The camel is greatly taken with music and melody. So much so, indeed, that if he halts through weariness, the driver does not urge it with stripes and blows, but soothes it by his songs. Several travellers have mentioned these songs. See, for example, Miss Rogers' account of the Bedouins ; their songs were already subdued to harmonise with their monotonous swinging pace, and chimed softly and plaintively with the tinkling of camel-bells, thus :—

"Dear unto me as the sight of mine eyes
Art thou, O my Camel !

Precious to me as the health of my life
Art thou, O my Camel !
Sweet to my ears is the sound
Of thy tinkling bells, O my Camel !
And sweet to thy listening ears
Is the sound of my evening song."

There is no need for me either to say what loving care the Arab bestows on his horse, when he has one. Poets have taken great pains to let us all know the truth in this matter :—

> "My beautiful, my beautiful, that standest meekly by,
> With proudly arched and glossy neck and dark and fiery eye," etc., etc.

Personally, although I am aware of the fact that the Arab horses are, or were, the best in the world, I think a horse quite out of place in the sandy wastes of the Desert, just as he is out of place on our paved streets, where in a few years we shall not see him at all any longer.

This reminds me of a lecture I once gave to two thousand children in New York. In the interval a very tiny, pretty little thing came up, and looking right at me with her wonderful eyes, said : "I once saw a horse and a cab." "Yes, my little lady," I replied, "and when you grow up and get to my age the fact that you saw such a sight will be considered something wonderful."

And so it will, especially as regards the cab. But not more wonderful than the difference between a horse now and a horse in his original state of evolution. Then he was not as big as a greyhound, and had five toes on each foot. But this is by the way.

It is said, too, that the Arab is incapable of deep thinking, and that his existence is an aimless one, that so long as he has enough for the needs of the day

he cares nothing about the morrow. This may be true. In the Desert not so very many years ago riches were a burden, a rich man was liable to have his throat cut during the night. It was then in some way actually advantageous to be poor and obscure, and to consider not the morrow.

But of his seeming improvidence the Arab's business instincts are good, as the following story shows :—

Down the Desert once I had occasion to require the services of five or six camel men and their camels. I hired them for a number of days and paid what they asked me. When I wanted these camel men again for a similar period they asked double the former price. The sum involved being small, I agreed to pay it. It was arranged that they were to meet me next morning at the starting-point some miles out in the Desert. Judge my surprise when I found only one of the men I had engaged had turned up. All the others, men and camels, were different.

I refused to have anything to do with this party of strangers, and sent them all back. On my making inquiry afterwards the puzzle was explained to me. The original lot had managed to hire substitutes at the price I paid them first time I used them, and had then stayed at home with the intention of being paid for doing nothing. I at once visited the French Commandant and had the matter put in order. My original Arabs turned up quite brightly next morning to carry out the job, and did not appear to be at all abashed at the trouble they had caused me. So far as

they were concerned the affair was merely a good stroke of business that had gone wrong.

Here is an instance, too, not so rare as one would imagine, of Arab business men exhibiting courage and perseverance and reaping a reward.

The French sank a well many feet deep, but without success, and finally gave it up in despair, when a couple of Arabs put all the money they had together to furnish funds to dig deeper in a last effort to strike water. Strange to relate, this water was found in less than another fifty feet. The volume of water was so great that it flooded the whole neighbourhood. A huge lake and swamp was the result. A friend of mine told me that within a few days duck and snipe came in great numbers and took up their abode on the lake.

The politeness with which I have been treated during my various expeditions by Arabs of all ranks I need not dwell on. Their hospitality is proverbial, and a meal in a better class Arab house is a very enjoyable affair. They provide the European with wine although they do not drink it themselves. Their soups, eaten with wooden spoons, for Islam forbids metal to be used, and their sweets are excellent. The *pièce de résistance* at meals nearly always is, of course, the kous-kous.

It was at Touggourt, where I dined with an Arab on my first visit, that I was introduced to the national dish. Kous-kous consists of steamed wheatmeal or semolina, to which is added first vegetables that have been cooked separately, then nuts, raisins, etc., then a broth is poured over the mess, and lastly (by those who can

afford it) fowl or meat is added. It is a most satisfying and nourishing dish, and frankly I enjoy it. Sometimes all present sit round the dish and take portions from it with their fingers. You never know whether it will be your luck to come across a piece of chicken, a date, or merely a nut.

The Arabs think very highly of the kous-kous, which their women-folk prepare daily. They call it "Something good," and I agree that it is an excellent invention, but for those who want to get thin I should advise a moderate indulgence in it.

I remember well the delight of my Arab friend when I tried it at the dinner party mentioned above, and promptly asked for a second helping. The Arab is proud of his national dish, and likes it to be appreciated.

Another story of a dinner, or rather luncheon party.

We were asked to luncheon by a sheik at Temacin. He took the head of the table himself. It was noticed after a time that as the dishes came on a messenger would come up with them and speak to him. Also that he was not eating. The luncheon finished, the sheik suggested having coffee, but this we declined. On our leaving a little later he said, bidding us adieu, "Gentlemen, you will be sorry to hear that my father died whilst we were having lunch." The man had not turned a hair during the whole of the luncheon, in spite of the fact that the messenger was giving him news concerning his father's last moments. His politeness forbade him exhibiting his private sorrow to his guests.

This is, as all will agree, fortitude exhibited at its maximum. I question if a person of another nationality could have shown such self-control. It is one of the qualities which the Arabs admire, and which they all strive desperately to cultivate.

That they succeed their faces and actions show. And yet inwardly they are most excitable people, passions burning within them hot and scorching as the Desert sun itself.

A curious nature, you will say. An interesting nature too.

Some years ago my friend Mr. W. H. Edgar told me the following story :

On arriving one day at on oasis in the Desert he found that there had been a small local fight, and that one man had got a bullet through his chest. A French doctor had been sent for, but he was three days away. Edgar and his friend were asked to look at the man. They found the wound wrapped up in dirty rags. They dressed it with boracic lint and went on with their caravan, leaving the man feeling much relieved.

News spreads quickly through the Desert. Edgar and his companion's fame as medicine men preceded them. On arriving at a sheik's house in the next oasis he asked them if they would cure his daughter, who was suffering from inflamed eyes. My friend Edgar explained to the sheik that they were photographers, and not doctors. The sheik replied that that did not matter. They must cure his daughter.

So Doctor Boracic was again brought into play with good results, and the caravan went on again. Next day the sheik sent an urgent message after the caravan. On returning my friend found the sheik lying down, surrounded by all his followers. He was in great pain, it seemed. He wanted a cure. Again my friend explained that they were only photographers. But the sheik insisted on my friend giving his services. He explained that the pain was in his chest, and that it always came on after he ate machoui (a dish of very greasy roast mutton). My friend Edgar looked wise. He had no remedies for indigestion with him.

"Do you only get this pain after eating machoui?" he asked.

"Yes," said the sheik.

"Then," said Edgar, "eat no more of machoui."

To which the sheik thoughtfully replied, looking round at his retainers:

"Ah, yes, these gentlemen are right. I will not eat any more of machoui."

III

As soon as kous-kous was over and the evening cup of coffee drunk it was my wont to sit at the camp-fire enjoying a pipe. Those glorious cedar fires of Central Africa with their glowing heat and lovely perfume are not to be had here. But the Desert fire has for me a charm all its own. It acts as a companion in one's loneliness. It helps one in

one's musing when the dying sun sinks low and the clear sky darkens into night.

And when the darkness had fallen, I remember, the Arabs would begin their music. Low and spasmodic the first notes sounded, like a kind of tuning-up. But afterwards the musicians would glide forward and take their places at the fire, and the real music would commence. At first the tunes and harmony were plaintive. Next a soloist would lift his voice in joy, the other Arabs joining in the chorus.

The words and meaning of such songs were similar to those I have heard sung by the Central African savage. They were a droning narration of what had happened to the caravan either during the day or during the trip. Or they were something to do with the scenery. And, of course, the ladies, the attar of roses, musk, and amber that they adore, and other lovely things were mentioned. It wouldn't do to leave them out!

But these concerts never lasted very long, as they do with savages. A day on a camel through the hot Desert, and the drinking in of the thin, dry, scorched air, makes one long for sleep with the glad, tired feeling of the perfectly healthy man. And soon every man of us nearly, together with our animals, would be lying down under the clear, calm, starry sky, very fast asleep.

These shooting stars you see at night in the Desert, say the Arabs, are devils who are always trying to climb to heaven. Just as they are getting there the

angels throw them over, and as they fall they look like shooting stars. So you must be very careful when you see one to call out quickly, "Elph, Elph," Arabic for "a thousand," and to continue so calling as long as a shooting star is visible.

I often surprised my camp-fire companions of an evening by burning a magnesium flare. What the other travellers in the Desert must have thought when they saw the distant glare I don't know. But it gave the Arabs food for conversation, at any rate, from what I heard afterwards. These flares are so powerful that everything is lit up for a great distance around you. They burn for something like a minute and a half.

It is a habit of mine when in the Desert to be up and about before sunrise. The air is like champagne then, so sweet is it and so strongly exhilarating. I see the dim light breaking in the east, stealing over the lonely sand, over the sleeping forms of men and camels. Then breaks the glory of the sun. Everything, the rocks, the dunes, the sand, the distant mountains, shows itself, flushes, and for a moment looks as if alive. But for a moment only. Then the illusion is gone. You see the Desert in all its savage splendour, dead and yet menacing, forbidding but utterly grand. No twittering of birds welcomes that daybreak. No sound goes forth as the sun passes upward into the pallid sky. And as the sun gradually rises, so the scene begins to change again. The shadows of the sand dunes show their shape.

A different landscape now arranges itself before my eyes.

A few yards from me I see the little footprints of the rodents who have been busy in the night. A hundred yards away I come across marks which have been left by some reptile. In a few hours the wind will rise, the sand will move, and these marks will be obliterated, and a clean slate be ready again for the night.

Strolling farther along, I come across the carcass of a camel. The sand is drifting up against it, and the skin is dry and the ribs stick out. The complete skin on the carcass proves that there are no vultures about. Altogether a sad picture, giving food for thought, and one that you do not readily forget. It makes you think of the tragedies this lonely, savage, burning Desert you are standing in must have seen. How many thousands, nay, millions of men and animals must have laid down and died in these wastes of shifting sands!

And yet, dangerous though the Desert is, they tell me that nowadays in the part of it occupied by the French very few Arabs ever perish, although they are caught sometimes in terrific sandstorms. Not long ago I read in a London paper of a cinema expedition that was caught in a sandstorm and the Arab followers all perished. But the English leader of the expedition escaped, although the storm had made sand dunes several hundred feet high. As the American would say, "Some storm!" and as I should say, "Some story-teller!"

My Arabs can never understand the fact of my getting up so early and spending so much time with two cameras watching for these beautiful sunrises. The Arabs have another form of devotion. They have their religion. I have mine.

I watch them at these devotions of theirs. Their foreheads touch the sand. The sand clinging to them is sacred, a mark of their piety, not to be removed. What a fitting frame for this stern religion of theirs the Desert makes!

The savage sun mounts higher in the sky. I eat my frugal breakfast and, lingering over the last cup of coffee, smoke my pipe and watch the Arabs strike camp.

Not until all is ready do I move. I mount my camel. The burning sun beats down. Swing, swing . . . . crush, crush, of the camel's pads on the sand. . . .

He is indeed the Ship of the Desert. But he won't make me sea-sick. I am a pretty good sailor, thank goodness!

On we slowly creep, single file, over the glaring wastes of sand, wending our way through the white dunes. The heat is so great, so breathless, that I wonder how I can endure it. But I am enduring it, and, more, liking it, simply because of the air, that intoxicating air that seems to increase one's vitality and render the nerves and sensibilities doubly keen.

Presently we shall stop and have our midday meal at that oasis whose palms already show like tiny black

stars on the shimmering horizon. And then on once more till we camp again for the night.

But the Desert is not always as I have pictured it here. Sometimes the sky is overcast and the sun no longer shines. The Desert in such gloomy weather, under a sombre sky, looks more than ever a land of desolation. The unbroken clouds, lowered like a blanket, make the sand appear inhospitably white, white, in fact, as bleached bones.

I have written already of a thing which, apart from anything else, draws me to the Desert. That is, the sunsets. I know as I ride on in this terrible heat that I shall see this evening yet another sunset whose beauty will leave me breathless, a sunset to which neither pen nor brush can do justice.

The fact that the Desert sunsets cannot be recorded on a cinematograph film always leaves me miserable. However, the day will come when colour photography is perfected, and then some lucky traveller will show people at home the glories of a Desert sunset, and they will understand why the least romantic of men, such as myself, speak of them so rapturously.

Some of these sunsets are soft and beautiful. Others are bold in their setting. Another will be full of fury and anger. You can imagine them as typifying love, anger, fear, and the rest of the emotions.

But apart altogether from any special features, the Desert itself is to me something vastly mysterious, a thing that in some indefinable way draws me to it. I love it at dawn and dusk, I love it in the daytime as it

lies immense and incandescent under the burning sun. At night, when the moon is shining and the stars are brilliant in the sky, it brings to me as few other things on earth can do, a feeling of infinite and perfect peace.

And as the Desert affects me, a plain man, so in a greater degree it affects the more poetically minded.

The things that poets have said about it from the earliest ages won't bear repeating. As for novelists, male and female, they come out by Cook's excursion to Biskra, get a glimpse of the Desert, and returning home, fairly spill the ink!

I remember being told while in the Sahara a story about a novelist who wished to make a very dramatic ending to a wonderful novel he had written on the Desert. He ended up the book thus :—

"Far, far away to the South, across the illimitable plains of desolation, arises a solitary palm. There in that grateful shade Louise lies buried. There is no name on the palm. Only a date!!!"

INDEX

	Page
Algiers	11–57
Baboons	76–84
Bach Aghar, The	230–235
Bedouins	134–144
Beetles	237
Biskra	147–158, 209–230
Boars	106, 121, 167
Bous-Saada	86–95
Camels	95–105, 256, 265, 281, 291–293
Caterpillars	29–38
Cervantes	53–55
Cliff Dwellers	170–173
Constantine	110–117
Dates	206–208, 249
Dervishes	56, 57, 148, 227, 228
Desert	85, 105, 134, 155, 157, 160–183, 198–208, 257–303
El Kantara	145, 146
Fabre, J. H.	34–37, 69–71
Falcons	234–236
"Garden of Aliah"	153
Gazelle	165, 177, 216, 217
Hammam-Meskoutine, Hot springs of	118
Hoopoe	42, 43, 72

INDEX

Page

Jerboas 182, 196–198, 238

Kabyles 83, 85, 107–111, 151, 241
Kasbah, The 60

Larks 182
Lions 105, 120, 121, 210, 211
Lizards 46, 93, 196, 206, 283–285
Locusts 46, 203–206
Lone-chat 263, 264

Mantis, Praying 47–49
Marabouts 148–150
Mecca 191
Migration of birds 72–76
Mirage 159
Mohammedans 188–195, 286–290
Mosaic 127
Moufflon 177, 217, 282

Ouled Naïls 88–92
Owls 157, 237, 282

Panthers 177, 178

Rats 237, 263, 282
Rock carvings 58
Roman remains 27, 59, 60, 110–112, 115, 125, 127, 144, 145, 173, 174, 245, 246

Salt Lakes, The 122
Sand diviner 154, 217
Sandstorm 261–263
Scorpions 217, 218

INDEX

	Page
Sidi Okba	184
Snakes	45, 168
Spider, The Trap-door	61–71
Stick Insects	47
Storks	107, 113, 129–133, 282
Tamellaht	255
Temacin	252
Timgad	126–129
Toads	46
Touggourt	239–256
Vipers	93, 94, 212, 267, 268, 283

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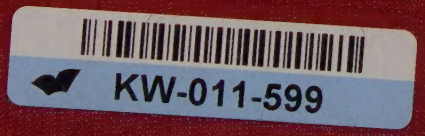
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